













LOVE BY AN INDIAN RIVER

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HISTORY OF FORT ST. GEORGE, MADRAS  
ON THE COROMANDEL COAST

THE NAUTCH GIRL

THE FOREST OFFICER

A MIXED MARRIAGE

THE SANYASI

DILYS

CASTE AND CREED

THE TEA-PLANTER

THE INEVITABLE LAW

DARK CORNERS

THE UNLUCKY MARK

SACRIFICE

THE RAJAH

THE MALABAR MAGICIAN

THE OUTCAST

LOVE IN THE HILLS

LOVE IN A PALACE

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LOVE  
BY AN INDIAN RIVER  
BY  
F. E. PENNY

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MARGERY LONGFORD . . .	A girl from California on a visit to India.
MR. and MRS. ENVILLE . . .	Of the Public Works Department.
ANTHONY BASILDON . . .	An Overseer in the same service.
RONALD WARRADAH . . .	In the Civil Service.
SURIYA (a Mahunt) . . .	President of a temple board of trustees.
YANN and MARY . . . . .	Ayans, mother and daughter.
SUNNEE . . . . .	Child of Mary.
NELLAPPA . . . . .	Mary's husband, a peon.
CARVALHO . . . . .	An Overseer.
His WIFE and FAMILY.	
A SADHU, VILLAGERS, SERVANTS, &c.	



# LOVE BY AN INDIAN RIVER

## CHAPTER I

A LARGE crowd gathered in the dining-hall of the Galle Face Hotel, Colombo, to enjoy the luxury of a good lunch ashore. They were passengers from ships that had recently come into harbour.

The hall opened into a broad verandah, below which was a stretch of terraces and a lawn bordered by a belt of cocoanut trees. The smooth rollers broke in magnificent waves of clear green water upon the narrow sands, and sent their foam up to the very edge of the palm grove. A refreshing breeze blew in off the sea, rustling the long, graceful fronds, and penetrating into the hall.

Through the archway leading into the dining-room passed Margery Longford. She advanced looking from right to left for a table to her taste. Her choice was made in characteristic manner, quickly and without hesitation. She dropped into a chair at a small round table laid for three people. None of the seats were occupied. She took up the menu and studied it.

At the same moment Anthony Basil don appeared at the entrance of the dining-hall. She caught sight of his tall figure over the top of the menu card and bent her head still lower, making no sign that she had seen him. With far less assurance than she had shown, he hesitated in his advance and finally stopped. At first sight the dining-room seemed to his bewildered eyes full, and without a single vacant seat.

A Singhalese waiter came forward and guided him towards the table where Margery was sitting. The man



pushed out one of the vacant chairs with a gesture of invitation. Basil don again paused, glancing involuntarily at the girl, as if looking for permission to join her. It was not given. Apparently she was unaware of his presence. Dropping the card she rose and, addressing the waiter who was departing in the direction of the buffet, he said—

"There is too much wind here ; find me another seat."

"This way, lady. Please be seated, sir, and I will bring some soup directly."

She moved off, following the Singhalese. A contraction of the brows showed her annoyance. Basil don took the offered chair, and for a few seconds the sign of annoyance was equally visible upon his own features. Then the lines suddenly cleared from his brow with an unconscious sigh.

"She is right!" he said to himself. "She has put me in my proper place. But how on earth did she discover what that place was?"

It was a question he was unable to answer.

"Miss Longford! are you looking for a seat?" cried a woman's voice close to her elbow. "If so, come here. We have just one chair vacant."

A party of five of her fellow-travellers were sitting at the very next table, which was laid for six.

"Thank you; I was trying to get away from the draught," she replied in explanation; yet she made no effort to pass on.

"Fancy trying to avoid the sea breeze! Why! I am nearly melted!" cried the youngest girl.

"You forget I come from a hot climate. I like the heat and I hate a draught."

"This is a breeze, not a draught. Do sit down and we will tell you our adventures in the pettah. I've bought tons and tons of curiosities, and all so cheap!"

The others laughed, and Margery slipped into the vacant chair, joining in the laugh against the purchaser.

"What makes you dislike him so?" whispered Miss Curiosity.

"I don't dislike him," returned Margery, in a low voice.

## CH. II] LOVE BY AN INDIAN RIVER

"Yes, you do ; I've seen it all the way along. He's a very good fellow, but he's shy ; and he doesn't understand a colonial like you."

"I'm not a colonial, I'm an American ; and we Americans always expect——"

Margery paused, feeling that she was somehow not saying quite the right thing. The English girl took her up with the privilege of board-ship friendship.

"I know exactly what you mean. He doesn't render the homage that all you Americans seem to expect from the men. I admit that he is stand-offish ; but, no doubt, he has some reason for it. Besides, homage and all that sort of grannie-stuff is obsolete, played out, defunct. We have arrived at an understanding with the boys. We're all on the same plane, very pleased to see the dear things when they're there ; and we are quite able to get on without them when duty calls them elsewhere."

"Hello ! there's Basildon !" said one of the men, nodding to the latest arrival at the next table.

Basildon returned the greeting politely, but with reserve, and took refuge, like Margery, in the study of the menu. His thoughts, however, were far away from the question of food. He was blaming himself for having taken his passage on a ship that had only one class. He could not avoid his fellow-passengers altogether ; and, although he made no effort to become better acquainted with any of them, a certain intimacy with some of the men sprang up ; and through this intimacy he had been brought into contact with most of the women. Whatever they might be on shore, they were genial and pleasant enough on the voyage.

Miss Longford was travelling alone ; there was no man to form a link between her and Basildon, also a solitary traveller. It so happened that when an opportunity of exchanging a few words occurred he found her cold and unresponsive. At once a stiffness crept into his manner which he could not conquer ; and he felt that, instead of becoming more friendly, they were, if anything, still greater strangers than when they nodded good morning on the first day at sea. Her candid friend

was not far wrong when she hinted that Margery was disappointed in Basildon, and unconsciously resented his aloofness.

The conversation at the table went from adventures in the pettah to plans for a flying visit to Kandy.

"Come with us, Miss Longford. Kandy is beautiful, and well worth seeing," said one of the men, a tea-planter, whose voyage had come to an end with his arrival at Colombo.

"It's lovely!" exclaimed the youngest girl of the party. "I saw Kandy on my way home last year. It's just like Earl's Court——"

"Earl's Court!" broke in another man who was going on to Burmah. "Earl's Court is not in it with Kandy!"

An animated discussion followed, during which Margery turned to the planter who had proposed that she should join the party. Basildon, as he sat at his solitary lunch, could not help hearing her reply.

"Thank you for asking me; I am sorry I can't manage it. I am going on by the Tuticorin boat this evening."

"What a pity! You ought to see Kandy and Newara Eliya."

"Perhaps on my way back I may be able to do so."

"You're going to stay with friends, aren't you?"

"That's so."

The reply was not encouraging; but the inquirer had his own reasons for wishing to know where she could be found and he risked just one more question.

"In Madras?"

"In the Presidency."

This was not the first time Margery had parried personal questions that she did not choose to answer. She was a woman of independent means, and she possessed a strong personality that was attractive. She had a broad outlook upon the world, and there was nothing narrow or insular about her views of life. She could be very frank, embarrassingly so, at times. On the other hand, she might be reticent to a fault. The reticence had been cultivated by a careful father, who

had inculcated business habits from her early youth till they became a second nature.

"Well! on your way back from wherever you are going, you must find time to see a little of Ceylon. Many people come over here for the hot weather some times. They declare that Colombo is always ten degrees cooler than Tuticoum; and that the climate up in our hill beats that of the Nilgiris. If ever you come, Miss Longford, do let me know. I am often up at Newara Eliya, at the Club, an address, by-the-by, that will always find me. My estate is not far off. I should be so pleased to show you the Horton Plains; and you horses and coolies and all that."

It was no empty promise that he made. If he could have believed that she would listen, he would have offered himself and his estate for her acceptance for life then and there, and counted himself a fortunate man in securing a woman after his own heart. He knew he had no chance, however, unless he could see a great deal more of her; and it was with this object that he was making an effort to induce her to pay a visit to Newara Eliya. By his manner she was aware that he meant every word he spoke. She smiled and thanked him warmly, adding—

"I shall not have time to do much when I once start for home. I shall have to keep on right away till I get there."

"You will hear California calling"

"No; it will be the fruit-canning business that will be calling. I see to it myself, just as my father did. I've left a manager in charge for twelve months. It will cost me more than my holiday expenses, but that can't be helped, unless I make it good out here in the east."

"Surely a manager can do as well as a proprietor if he is an honest man."

"It isn't what a man *can* do that you have to reckon with; it's what he *will* do; and what a manager will do is just a little less than what a proprietor will do; as you will find out when you take over charge of your estate."

He smiled a little ruefully as he remembered how he had cut his holiday short and was hurrying back to look

after his own interests in the troublous times that were overshadowing commerce of all kinds.

"It is certainly a period just now when it is necessary to keep one's weather-eye open," he said, speaking as though he were talking to a business man.

"Meanwhile keep that weather-eye on the look-out for new markets. To tell you the truth, that's what I'm out for. You have the advantage over me in one respect; tea is a necessity, canned fruit is a luxury."

"Tea is taxed, canned fruit is not."

"For all you know, canned fruit may be."

They had drifted far away from sentimental thoughts of meeting again, and nothing more was said about a possible visit to the Island. As Margery talked her eyes wandered round the room.

"Isn't that Mrs. Jervis over there?" she asked, as she noticed a solitary figure left conspicuous when the rest of the people at the distant table rose and departed.

"Yes; she is disappointed because her husband has not come down to meet her. Poor chap! he was unable to do so."

"Why should he be unable?"

"Fact is, he's hit over tea. Freights are up; insurance more than doubled and trade is dislocated. As you know, war conditions have hit us all more or less; Jervis more so because his estate is heavily mortgaged."

"I'm so sorry for her!" was Margery's comment as she gazed at the sad figure compassionately.

There was a stir. Basildon rose from his chair at the same time. He paused diffidently; it was the last time he would meet the merry party; and he wanted to say some sort of farewell to the men and women who had been friendly during the last three weeks. The youngest girl divined his thoughts. She put him at his ease at once by advancing with outstretched hand.

"Good-bye, Mr. Basildon, if we don't meet again. I am sorry I didn't give you the beating you deserved at quoits. I'll do it on the next voyage we take together."

One after another the rest of the party followed her example. Margery alone remained aloof. She stood by the table, her hand on the back of the chair she had just

vacated. She waited for Basilton to take a step or two forward that would bring them together and enable them to shake hands.

He did not take it but turned away with the planter, who had been the last to say good-bye; and the two men continued their conversation as they moved towards the archway leading into the entrance hall. Basilton had not omitted to bid her farewell intentionally. On the contrary he had looked at the averted face a little wistfully. Then recalling her action in leaving the table as he was about to sit down, he concluded that for reason of her own she had no wish to see more of him.

As she realized that he was actually departing without word or sign an unreasonable annoyance gripped her. She swung round to look after his retreating figure. He had replaced his hat on his head and was still listening to what his companion was saying.

At the doorway some telepathic instinct must have made him aware that her eyes were upon him; for he turned suddenly and their eyes met in a swift glance in which each knew that the other was for a moment the centre of thought. He lifted his hat and passed out of her sight. The youngest girl came hurrying back towards her.

"We forgot that we should not see you again, Miss Longford, unless you will join us in the verandah. Do come and have some coffee; it is ready over there; and you ought to see the conjurer outside. He has a basket full of horrid deadly snakes; it's fascinating! Oh! do come!"

"I'll join you in a few minutes. I want to say good-bye to Mrs. Jervis."

She went across the room, which was emptying fast, and took a chair by that lady's side.

"I am so sorry to hear that you have been disappointed. Your husband was not able to come and meet you, I am told."

Mrs. Jervis looked up with eyes into which a sudden moisture sprang. The tone of the voice was sympathetic and kind. Everybody had been so fully occupied with his or her own affairs on landing that no one had given a

thought to the sad little woman, one of the unrecorded heroines of the exiled life of the tropics.

"It is a disappointment, but it can't be helped——" she hesitated and broke off as if she would have added more, but remembered that she was speaking to a comparative stranger, who could not be expected to take much interest in her private affairs.

"Yes, I know," continued the kind voice. "Times are bad because of the war ; but things will right themselves. I know what it is to be anxious about business and all that. You'll be able, like the rest of us, to tide it over. The war can't last for ever."

The overburdened wife of the struggling planter could not resist the luxury and relief of pouring out her troubles. It was a long five minutes before Margery was able to join the party in the front verandah, where the pipes of the conjurers squealed and the cobras spread their hoods, hawkers exposed their wares and beggars held out eager hands for cents. She had to listen to the difficulties incurred in working a mortgaged estate ; of how the sum required for the interest must be raised at all hazards punctually to the day on which it was due ; of estate coolies who must be paid, whether there were any receipts from crop or not ; of the slump in rubber which had proved nothing less than a catastrophe to many men.

"I think I can manage ; I think I can just manage to keep the house going—but there are the three children at home. If I had known what was coming I would not have taken them home. I might have kept them out a little longer."

"They are better in England," said Margery, her heart going out to the bereaved mother who had sacrificed herself for the sake of the little ones.

They had moved away from the lunch table and were seated in the quiet verandah looking out towards the shore. The sea shone in blue and silver through the palms, the boom of the waves rolled in on the breeze and the cocoanut trees rustled softly. Carrion crows foraged along the shore among the flotsam and jetsam cast out from the big liners, they grew sleek and glossy on the

harvest of the sands. Sparrows chirped and squabbled on the terraces, preying on the insects that sought the warm rays of the midday sun. To the right beyond the belt of palms the rickshas were parked, and the swift footed men chattered and gossiped to keep themselves awake as they waited for their fares—those strange people who came on ships and never seemed to need the midday sleep, the black man's holiday that made the long day endurable to the worker.

Margery drew a small teapoy towards her, opened her bag and took out cheque-book and fountain pen. When she had signed her name she tore out the leaf and handed it to her astounded companion.

"Oh! but—but—this is too much to—I didn't burden you with my story in expectation——" Mrs. Jervis was incoherent in her surprise.

"I know you didn't," replied Margery shortly and without sentiment.

"It's too great a gift! If I might consider it a loan, I could pay a small interest——"

"I don't seem to fit in as a money-lender," replied Margery in her American speech. "But if you like, you may look upon it as a loan without interest. You can repay me at some far future time when matters are brighter. No; I won't take a receipt. Now I must say good-bye. There's my permanent address. I hope to be back in California this time next year. Good-bye and good luck to you and your husband and the kiddies."

Mrs. Jervis was left bewildered and scarcely daring to believe her eyes as she examined the substantial cheque that made the future secure. From the cheque her eyes went to the card Margery had given her.

ELIHU AND MARGERY LONGFORD,  
FRUIT EXPORTERS,  
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA.



## CHAPTER II

IT was with much difficulty and considerable strain of temper that Margery Longford succeeded in getting herself and her luggage transferred from the big liner to the coaster which was to take her across to Tuticorin. The coaster was small and cramped after the mail boat. Everything was in miniature, including the cabin to which she retired.

She had had a long morning ashore; and she returned to the big ship for her luggage while the afternoon sun was still high in the heavens. The struggle to get her wishes carried out by a parcel of half-naked men, who spoke an unknown tongue, was a last straw. When it came to paying them they seemed somehow to have doubled their number. There were twice as many holding out receptive palms as she possessed boxes. She turned away at last in despair, feeling that she must have paid them two or three times over. The boat containing the clamouring horde was driven off with little ceremony by the lascar in charge of the gangway. In his hand he carried a useful rope's-end, the sight of which helped in the speeding of the vociferous crew.

A strong smell of engine oil and sliced onions pervaded the little saloon into which the cabins opened. It was mingled with various pantry odours, suggesting a perennial washing up of used crockery and a large colony of resident cockroaches. The charged atmosphere decided the question of dinner. Margery felt that she could not face the ordeal of a fresh set of passengers, and when the cabin servant, who was also table attendant and steward, knocked to inquire if she would come out to dinner, or if she would prefer some

soup and a few biscuits brought into the cabin, she thankfully closed with the latter proposal.

The Goanese servant was pleased to be allowed to wait on her. The more she needed his services, the greater would be the tip that would ultimately find its way into his pocket.

The sea outside the harbour was still feeling the effects of a recent storm. After a hurried meal she slipped into her berth and fell asleep before she had time to think of possible sea-sickness.

At dawn she was awakened by the same attentive servant who appeared with tea and toast—the steamer did not carry a stewardess. He brought the information that they would anchor off Tuticorin in an hour's time, when the tender would meet the ship to take the passengers ashore.

"How many passengers are there?" she asked.

"Five gentlemen, and two hundred coolies, lady, and your honour's self."

"Coolies?" she repeated.

"Native people who have been working on tea estates in Ceylon, and now returning to ancestral domiciles in affluence. Coolies! Oh, my! They go to Ceylon empty as tomtoms and up to crown of head in debt. They come back full of rice and filthy lucre, yet they never trouble to give a poor hard-working cabin boy a pice!"

He turned to go, too much overcome at the thought of human depravity to say more, and left his concluding sentence to work in the mind of the lady passenger. She called him back.

"What time is breakfast?"

"Breakfast will be taken on the train, lady. We only serve chota hazri. Can I bring more toast and tea?"

"No, thanks; I will ring if I want anything."

"The bar is open if lady likes any iced drinks, lime juice and soda or gingerade; very good pick me-up, gingerade."

She refused to have anything from the bar, much to his disappointment, as he made a small percentage on

the drinks ; and he departed to his pantry. The officers of the ship must breakfast, lunch, and dine on board whether there were passengers or not ; and the wholesome onion had to be sliced and dressed with vinegar and pepper for every meal and the plates washed up afterwards.

There was still a swell on the sea. The green rollers were rippled with silver wavelets brushed up by the morning breeze. A cloudless sun emerged from a level horizon and sent its slanting rays through the porthole. The spots of gold moved over the steel walls of the cabin with the swaying of the ship upon the waves ; she creaked slightly as she leaned on this side and on that. Occasionally the water splashed up and slapped the black hull, sending up a shower of spray that scintillated with prismatic colours. Behind the vessel floated a flock of gulls on outspread wings that did no more than quiver as the birds turned in their search for scraps of food cast adrift from the steamer. Margery could hear their melancholy screams above the diapason throbbing of the engines. The sound of the pistons became as much a part of the life of the ship as the breathing of a human being. When it ceased with the anchoring of the ship it was like the death of some huge monster.

Margery felt no ill effects from the roll. Her fatigue had vanished ; and the thought that she was presently to set foot in the India she had so frequently heard of from her friend roused all her curiosity. She drank her tea and then dressed without haste. As she was packing her dressing-bag the engines stopped ; she heard the panting of a steam tug alongside and voices from the level of the sea. The ship had arrived sooner than the hour and she was not quite ready to go up on deck. Ten minutes later the cabin servant appeared at the door with lascars to remove the luggage. Under his directions her property was carried off and she followed as quickly as she could.

The brilliant morning sun dazzled her with its glittering reflections from the water ; she could distinguish nothing but the newly scoured deck at her feet, a low palm-girt horizon in the distance, a swaying tender

full of dark forms crowded together from the bows to amidships. The stern was reserved for the Europeans. It was furnished with an awning and cushioned seats. Four men were already there. They glanced up at her as she came down the gangway and stepped on to the somewhat unsteady platform.

Suddenly a sense of having kept every one waiting assailed her. It was increased by hearing the ship's officer hurrying the lascars in lowering the luggage. The swell caused the ship to swing away from the launch and approach it again with each wave. To get on to the launch safely the passenger must step down at the critical moment, an easy matter for those who were accustomed to it, but embarrassing to a novice.

A native boatswain in the tender held out his dark, oil-begrimed hand as the two boats drew together with the rhythmical movement of the sea. Margery hesitated. It was a steep drop into the boat, and she was in doubt whether to step on to the seat or on to the boards at the bottom. To add to her difficulty the launch heeled over towards her, interposing the awning which seemed to bar the way.

"Jump, lady! jump!" cried the boatswain, stretching out his hand to the utmost.

Still she hesitated; and the critical moment of contact passed before she could summon up courage to throw herself into the arms of the boatswain. The tender heeled over to the other side and the awning no longer obstructed the way, but the boats began to draw apart.

At the entreaty to jump she made an involuntary movement forward. Then realizing that the distance was too great, she tried to draw back. She saw the sunlit water at her feet, clear and green like an aqua-marine stone of the finest lustre. Strange jelly-fish floated on the current, and long detached trails of soft brown seaweed serpentine with a slow, lazy movement as if half alive. The waves came up towards her with a luring invitation as the ship bent downwards, and the water looked warm and sunny.

A shout from above startled her. She tried to draw

back, but the tilt of the leaning ship gave her forward too great to check. She lost her in another moment would have fallen if had not her waist been encircled by a She felt herself wrenched back by a superior her equilibrium restored. She had no time to thank her rescuer, for once more the boat was moving towards each other.

"Now! step down quietly on to the seaward awning gets in the way. Catch the lascars steady yourself. Now!" said an author behind her.

The command was obeyed. She could do none otherwise than obey it, for the arm was round her waist, and she felt its strength as it moved forward. Breathless, but perfectly safe, she stepped to the bench under the awning where she was sheltered from the sun. It was not until she was seated that the arm was withdrawn. Then she saw her deliverer who had placed himself by her side.

"Thank you so much, Mr. Basildon," she said with some warmth. "That was a close call!"

"You should have waited for the ship to come, seeing your luggage on board and would have been here in another minute."

"I was afraid that I was holding up the ship," he replied hurriedly.

By this time the officer had run down the gangway and was standing on the platform from which she had so nearly precipitated herself into the sea. He looked at her with mingled annoyance and relief.

"Gave you up for lost that time!" he said. "You ought to have waited for me. I should have been blamed if anything had happened."

She recognized the note of irritation in his voice and tried to make light of the incident with an attempt at a smile.

"Sorry to be such a trouble. I thought I was keeping you all waiting, and--and this is my fault. We don't land in this primitive fashion, come from."

Her speech did not tend to mend matters.

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"You may thank that gentleman for saving your life," replied the officer, evenly. He was of the opinion that all women travelling alone were more or less of a nuisance. His own life in the ferry boat was monotonous in the extreme. There was nothing attractive about it; and he could not understand how other people, travelling for what they called pleasure, could find anything amusing in a tropical climate that scooped the life out of a European. "He was on the spot only just in time."

"I can swim," replied Margery, slightly resenting his tone.

"So can the sharks," responded the officer, who approved as little of her lightness as he did of her presence there at all. "Good-bye! I hope you will be more careful at the other end."

"We will see to that!" chorused her fellow-passengers as the tender cast off and began to pant her way in puffs of steam towards the shore.

During the conversation with the ship's officer Basildon remained silent. He too had received a fright; for he alone knew how nearly he had failed to draw her back, and how very nearly she had overbalanced him.

The journey was not new to Basildon and he fully realized the danger of the incident. The current was strong; she might have been carried out of their reach before any attempt could have been made to rescue her. He would have undoubtedly plunged in after her; but though they could both swim and might have kept afloat some time, there was the other danger mentioned by the officer. Sharks are like eagles in their marvellous scent or sight of prey, and they are more attracted by white than by any other colour. Margery's dress was of white muslin; his suit was of white drill. His uncomfortable train of thought was interrupted by Margery.

"I am very grateful," she said a little awkwardly, remembering how they had parted at the hotel in Colombo. "If it had not been for you I suppose I should have fallen in and made a meal for the sharks."

"Please don't mention it. I should have done the

same for—for a coolie woman." There was a slight pause as he reconsidered his words; they did not sound quite polite, and he added as if in explanation: "A human life is a human life, and a man would be a brute not to do his best to save it. You gave us all a bad half-minute. These four gentlemen here were as startled as I was. They all jumped up to help; but the boat carried them out of reach."

"It was lucky for me that you had not joined them. Why did you wait?"

"There was no hurry. I was with the officer who was seeing to the transshipping of the luggage. As soon as you appeared I followed and arrived in the nick of time."

"Yes;" said Margery, thoughtfully. "It was a close call, as I said before; but you jumped into the business with both feet and saved me. I'm real grateful." After a slight pause she looked at him and added, "Then you knew I was on board."

"Your name on your luggage would have given me the information; but I heard you tell your friends at lunch yesterday that you intended to cross last night. I didn't see you at dinner."

"No; I could not stand the stuffy little saloon. I asked the cabin servant to bring me something and I was glad to turn in early."

Again she tried to express her gratitude. The words came awkwardly, and the more she said the more ill at ease he seemed to be. Finally she relapsed into silence, feeling that he was unresponsive and that it was useless to repeat what she had already said. The launch felt the motion as it rode over the waves, and although she did not suffer from its liveliness, she was not altogether comfortable.

"Have you a servant to meet you at the jetty, Miss Longford?" asked Basildon, presently.

"No, I don't need one."

"You will feel the need of some one to look after your property as soon as you arrive in Madras."

She let his remark pass without comment and asked which train he intended to travel by.

"There is only one. It runs through to Madrid, stopping at most of the stations. It waits for the mail that are brought over by the steamer. We have them on board with us."

The other passengers who had fraternized over dinner the previous evening were chatting together after the wont of travellers, as if they had known each other for weeks instead of hours. Even if Basidon had been inclined to join in the conversation, he could not have done so, except by speaking across Margery who was between him and them. He had no desire to talk, however. He was content to sit by the side of a woman whose personality attracted him more than a little. In some indefinable manner she differed from the English women he had known in India and England. It was the same quality which had attracted the Ceylon planter. There was something about her that suggested the thought of comradeship and friendship. She took a broader view of life than most women, and trouble, nothing about detail. After speaking with a man he could not say whether he was good-looking or downright ugly; but she knew exactly if she liked him or not. She expressed herself in direct and forcible language, with here and there an Americanism or little bits of slang. Self-consciousness, which is the outcome of too close an introspection, was entirely absent. The planter had arrived at the conclusion that she was just the sort of woman he would like to make his wife; and Basidon, who had no intention of marrying, was arriving at the conclusion, as he sat there, that he would like to make just such a woman as Margery Longford his friend. To have a friend to whom he could speak out his thoughts and be sure of a sympathetic listener seemed to the lonely man the greatest boon that Heaven could grant.

No sooner had the wish formulated in his mind than he stifled it. Such a friendship was impossible; it was like crying for the moon. He set it aside, as he had been in the habit of setting aside other aspirations, and brought his wandering thoughts back to the realities immediately surrounding him.

The long flat sandy shore with its dark green palms



and low houses grew more distinct. Hare Island was passed and the sea became smoother. The scenery was different from Colombo. The palms were less graceful and the extent of sand greater. It was more sunburned and dreary; and the quivering heat robbed the landscape of all richness of colouring. The glare on the water was trying to the eyes; and the awning seemed of little real use in keeping off the sun.

It was with great relief that Margery felt the tender grate gently along the edge of the low primitive wharf that served as a landing-stage for the open port of Tuticorin. At the extreme end of the jetty squatted a gang of coolies like so many birds of prey, ready to seize luggage of any description and carry it off to the train waiting at the entrance of the jetty.

She glanced at the black forms apprehensively. Was it to be a repetition of the struggle she had had at Colombo? She need not have feared any such encounter with Basildon there. He knew the language and could speak it fluently. Without asking her permission he took possession of her and her property, first handing her safely out of the tender and placing her apart from the noisy crowd. She stood where he left her, helpless and dependent, a most unusual position in which to find herself and not at all to her mind. There was no help for it, however; for she felt that she was utterly incompetent to deal with the clamouring horde.

When order was restored and porters chosen, the rejected ones accepted their fate with resignation. They ceased to clamour and gazed at the passengers with idle curiosity in which there was very little interest, seeing that nothing more was to be got out of the strangers.

"Now, Miss Longford, we may go to the train," said Basildon, returning to her. "The luggage is under weigh, and the next thing to be done is to find you a carriage on the train."

"Thank you; it is real kind of you to look after me in this way," she said as they walked the short distance between the landing-stage and the railway platform.

"Put up your umbrella."

"I shall not need it this short distance."

"Excuse me, it is very hot here. I shall go to the sun-bath. The Indian sun in the south is dangerous from the time it rises. Please put it up."

She obeyed even while she inwardly rebelled.

If you particularly wish it," she replied, as though making a concession to a foolish demand.

He found a ladies' compartment, called a porter to rearrange the cushions and cast a quick eye round to see that she had all that was necessary for her comfort.

"Are you going through to Madras?" he asked as he was about to leave the carriage.

"No," she replied shortly. She was on the defensive at once, believing the question to be prompted by curiosity, and entirely forgetting that she had left him to see after her baggage. He understood and explained it without asking.

"I must see the luggage labelled or it will be carried off," he said with the faintest grin as he asked it.

Vexed with herself for having mistaken his motive she named the little station where she was leaving the train.

"From there I am going on by road to a place called Sirraloor."

He looked at her curiously for a second; then, recollecting himself, he turned to go. A sudden desire seized her to tell him more.

"I am joining some friends in camp, a Mr. and Mrs. Enville——"

To her surprise he did not wait to hear more.

"Excuse me, I must see the luggage labelled at once. The train will be starting soon."

He walked quickly away towards the gang of coolies who stood round the baggage. She looked out after him and watched his tall broad figure moving up the platform. He passed through the groups of native travellers and was lost in the crowd.

The people interested her. The hurrying throng ran up and down in bewildered, aimless fashion. The men carried shapeless bundles knotted in discoloured calico. The women had children dragging at their skirts or sitting

astride their hips. Everybody shouted at the top of his voice ; no one listened. They crawled into carriages and out again as they searched for a less crowded compartment. Failing in their quest they scrambled back to the one they had left.

Not a European was in sight. Basildon and the four men who had crossed over with her had disappeared. The last of the luggage was being put into the distant van, and a native in uniform began to shepherd the people into the carriages, rounding them up like a patient, watchful sheep-dog. The platform cleared in marvellous fashion, and after two or three whistles the train moved out of the station, carrying its load of chattering humanity over a wilderness of loose sand. The low dunes were dotted with tufts of grey-green grass. A little further on there were patches of ~~and beyond these were groups of sad-looking palmyra palms. They reminded her of stiff feather brooms, rigid and straight as to stem and varying only in height.~~ The fan-like foliage had none of the graceful lines of the cocoanut palms that are one of the beauties of Colombo.

Suddenly Margery bethought her of the coolies who had carried her luggage. She had not given Basildon any money to pay them. She wondered if they had been paid, and rightly concluded that he had satisfied them, or they would have found her out and come to claim what was due.

The thought of her indebtedness to him disquieted her. Already she had been the recipient of his help in more ways than one. It would be intolerable to have to accept his money as well. All through the voyage they had seen but little of each other. It was strange that she should be thrown into his society and suddenly find herself dependent upon him. If he had been the Ceylon planter she would have been quite happy in accepting his good offices ; but this man was not the person she would have chosen as a knight of travel.

Then she began to wonder why he was slightly different from the rest of the company on board ship. There was nothing she could take exception to in the fine, well-dressed figure, the clear complexion, the stead-

fast, blue-grey eyes that should have inspired confidence instead of distrust. Perhaps it was his reserve and his disinclination to make use of the opportunities given him to improve his acquaintance with his fellow travellers.

Who was he? Was it pride or shame that caused him to be reticent and to hold himself aloof from others? On more than one occasion she had heard speculations as to Basilton's position. The only fact that could be elicited—and this was achieved by the most inquisitive woman of the party—was that of his calling. He was an engineer of some kind, and he was returning to South India to take up definite work in which he had before been employed. It was also surmised that he was a single man without ties of any kind.

From his manner in managing the gang of coolies ~~she was inclined to think that he was accustomed to~~ ~~be commanded.~~ ~~her to put up~~ ~~diff.~~ She

## CHAPTER III

MARGERY looked out of the carriage window at the landscape. It was different from anything she had ever seen before. The sand had already been left behind ; a dull grey soil replaced it, a soil that darkened with moisture to the tint of a buffalo's hide. The patches of cactus were rarer and the palmyras more numerous. Nothing varied the monotony of the level. A faint blue line low in the distance was the line of the sea.

troubled her. While generous to a fault she was of an independent nature that hated obligations of all sorts. She was already indebted to him against her will for his personal aid in landing, as well as the saving of her life; and the thought of being still further indebted for a small sum of money was a last straw. She did not tell the idea of it, and almost disliked the man who had placed her under the obligation.

Margery had the compartment to herself. She had brought books to read, but her eyes often wandered to the landscape in spite of the glare. The endless, level expanse through which they passed had as strange a fascination as the level of the ocean. The day advanced and the mirage painted broad, still lagoons on the horizon. The phantomic pools were bordered with ~~reeds and grass~~ and took them to be real. She wondered ~~as they drew nearer to them. The~~ mysterious

admiring eyes of his russet mate as she added the finishing touches to the nest or brooded over her eggs.

Occasionally Margery caught sight of a group of mud huts without windows or chimneys. It was difficult to think of them as human habitations. Outside in the open women tended fires of wood on which the rice or millet was cooking for the midday meal. The blue smoke floated away against the sombre foliage of the palmyras. Little girls, miniature women in their sedate ways, assisted. Their brothers, less solemn and serious, were running free in charge of herds of black buffaloes and goats. The imps were supremely happy, as if their lives had been cast in a sunny playground. What the animals found to eat in that apparently waste land Margery could not understand. ~~Si~~  
herbage, yet the cattle were ~~gathered~~  
boys they ~~gathered~~  
gather.

ing a broad belt across his chest from shoulder to hip. Basildon turned and spoke to him.

"Get out the lady's bag and parcels" he said; and Margery found her dressing-case, and other trules which had travelled in the carriage with her, deposited at her feet. "Your heavy luggage has been put out Mrs Longford. Has any one come for you from Sarralot?"

"Mrs. Enville promised to be here with her automobile. Perhaps she is waiting outside the station; but please don't trouble about me any further. One moment I want to pay you for the porters who carried my baggage ashore at Tuticorn. How much did you give them?"

"Two rupees."

She hastily extracted the money from her bag and put it in his hand. He took it with an awkward ~~grace~~ ~~he~~ ~~followed~~ ~~him~~ ~~no~~ ~~opportunity~~ ~~of~~ ~~saying~~ ~~his~~ ~~obligation~~.

Please



entered the booking-office and glanced through the door leading into the station yard. She could see no sign of a machine, as she designated the motor-car. She went to the window of the booking-office and asked if a conveyance of any kind had come from Mrs. Enville.

The booking-clerk, a native, retired precipitately, closing the shutter. A conversation ensued inside the office, and presently the station master himself appeared. He wore a neat uniform and white turban; and he smiled blandly at her, showing a fine set of perfect teeth.

"Madam is asking for Mr. Enville? He is out in camp at Sirraloor, some ten miles distant," he said politely.

"He promised to send his automobile to meet me; has it come?"

"If Madam means  
seen of it."

sure to send the car. Your luggage is safe and a porter will look after it for you."

"Good-bye, Mr. Basildon; thank you so much!"

She turned away towards the platform entrance feeling that she had got rid of him at last. Why she was so anxious to escape from his company she did not stop to think. Of one thing she was conscious; she did not wish to be under any further obligation to him or to any other man. She was accustomed to travel alone; and if she needed assistance, she preferred to accept it from some one whom she could remunerate from her purse.

The heat of the day had gone, and a refreshing breeze had sprung up. The atmosphere of noise and bustle and dust departed with the train. The natives ~~she~~ had alighted melted away through the wicket-gate; she was inclined to ~~developed~~ in its normal quietude. command humanity rather than to ~~private~~ rooms. The her-self had felt this quality when he asked ~~hidden~~ lair her umbrella against the sun. There had been no ~~presence~~ in his tone. His reserve, therefore, could not be the result of a want of self-confidence. She concluded that it was due to a bachelor life in the backwoods. He had grown used to his solitary existence, and was independent of the companionship of others. She had known men in California who were similarly constituted. Having summed him up she set him aside. It was India and its people she had come to see; not the Englishmen employed in its services. With this idea firmly fixed in her mind she turned her attention to the country through which she was passing.

around her, she thought longingly of the car and wished it would come. She was tired of travelling, and would have been glad of a refreshing cup of tea.

The shadows deepened, and as if by magic the colours faded from the sky. A low-lying flare of orange just above the hills in the west was all that remained of the glories of the sunset. The questioning koel ceased his cry, and the parrakeets went to roost under the warm tiles of the building. The earth grew grey and dark as the moon asserted her dominion.

In vain Margery listened for the hoot of the car's horn. Was it possible that her telegram failed to reach her friend? The thought of being stranded at the station was not pleasant. Again she seated herself. At the end of another twenty minutes she returned to the booking-office. It was dark, but plain except a very light came from down on the horizon in the west. It was the glow of the foot hills of the western ghats.

In vain she watched for some change in the character of the landscape; but she could distinguish none. There was always the same level stretch of grey soil, its grass and herbage dried to a uniform colour; the same thin forest of palmyras; the same straight line of horizon on the east and the pale blue range of distant hills in the west. Over all quivered the heat of a cloudless Indian sun under which all colours faded.

The train drew up an hour or so later at a station with a long name that she could not pronounce. The guard appeared at the carriage door.

"Madam, will you take breakfast? A basket can be served here."

A native servant pushed a well-furnished tiffin basket into the carriage. Margery glanced up and down the platform. Again there was a crowd of natives but no Europeans were visible; she looked in vain for Basil don.

Was it possible that he had not come on by the train? If so she would not see him again. The thought disturbed her—not that she particularly desired to say good-bye. She had thanked him for saving her life; it was not necessary to repeat her thanks. It was the recollection of the rupees she owed for the coolies that

surrounding she wandered on. She had the night to herself, and the station behind her was within easy reach. The trees extended beyond the bungalow a little distance, and then the country was open. A rustle in the branches overhead startled her. Some creature—a roosting bird she took it to be—scrambled along a thick bough, scattering a shower of fragments of moss and bark as it went. A harsh guttural cry informed her that it was no bird, but some unseen beast that had been disturbed by her presence. It might be a wild cat or a monkey; probably the latter. She quickened her pace to get away from it, remembering that she had heard or read somewhere that monkeys were mischievous, and if irritated might bite. Wild cats were ~~just as bad~~ with the same failing.

points, and she ~~was~~ the last overshadowing tree why the railway never ~~was~~ immediately in front of lagoons eluded all approach and ~~was~~ that into the whitened sky as the train moved forward.

Long interminable rows of aloe marked the boundary of the line. Here and there, under the influence of the hot weather, one of the crowns had burst into bloom. The plant had expended its full store of vitality in the effort. The great pyramid of cream white blossom rose from a parent that was already in the throes of death. Beneath the cluster of browning spines was a group of young green crowns ready to take the place of the old one.

Shallow depressions showed where pools of rainwater would stand a little later. A few showers, the heralds of the north-east monsoon, had already moistened the ground. The grey-green babul trees had responded, and were putting forth tufts of delicate buds that would soon cover the spined branches with a wealth of blossom, insignificant in appearance but divinely scented.

Colonies of weaver birds hung their nests on the thorny boughs. The brown sparrow-like little birds were busy between hunting insects and threading fresh bits of fibre into their swaying pendent domiciles. Already the cock had put on his golden trimmings and was flaunting his fine feathers before the

jungle composed of prickly pear and a group of palmyras. Immediately after the call there arose a shattering volley of yelps as if a hundred canine beasts of some strange kind were giving tongue.

Her courage failed her; a sense of unprotected loneliness overwhelmed her; she turned and fled.

She saw no sign of ~~the~~ ~~herd~~ ~~contented~~. Like the herd ~~accepted~~ ~~the~~ ~~conditions~~ ~~of~~ ~~their~~ ~~life~~ ~~and~~ ~~could~~ ~~not~~ ~~find~~ ~~the~~ ~~green~~.

The day wore on with occasional stoppages at wayside stations. The mirage disappeared as the sun drew to the west, and the air came in hot puffs as if from a furnace. Wherever the train stopped there was always the same hurrying, chattering crowd of natives getting in and out of the carriages, the same rounding up by the guard and porters before the train started; and the same warning whistles. It was unlike anything that her own country offered.

The sun was near its setting when the train drew up at the station where Margery was to alight. She read the name on a large board; it was written in Tamil as well as English lettering. She stepped out on to the platform and looked up and down, fully expecting to see Josephine Enville, whose guest she was to be, waiting for her. The usual number of natives were leaving the train. Others were boarding it. They filled up the platform, and now that she was among them, she felt as if she was hedged in by walls of brown humanity.

Threading his way through the people came Anthony Baskin, and behind him walked a native servant wear-

## CHAPTER IV

WHEN Margery left Basildon in the booking-office she was under the impression that she had seen the last of him; and he knew from her manner that this was in her thoughts. He smiled to himself, but in some bitterness of spirit. An impulse, born of his natural kindness of heart, prompted him to offer his services in the event of "Thanks!" She answered: "After the snub he had more in her haste to be quit of her than could not be accepted."

"I am very grateful for all you have done," she said, "don't let me keep you any longer; you will miss your train."

She held out her hand as though to dismiss him on the spot with a friendly hand-shake. He accepted it, but there was the shadow of a smile on his lips as he did so.

"I am not going any further by train. Like yourself I leave it here."

"Oh, indeed!" she said, wondering what he could be doing at such an out-of-the-way place. "I was under the impression that you were bound for Madras. Are you a friend of the Envilles?"

"No;" he replied shortly. He turned to look towards the pile of luggage, his and hers, that was lying on the platform. The train was moving out of the station; and the passengers who had alighted were streaming away through a wicket gate where a native ticket collector was gathering in the grimy bits of coloured cardboard without haste.

"Do you know them?"

"I know Mr. Envill."

He walked off with the peon, giving him some directions in Tamil. Margery, slightly ruffled by his manner,

matey, as the old man was called, kept fowls, and made a profit out of eggs and table chickens. The appearance on the dinner-table of the latter followed the death sentence with startling rapidity.

Basildon walked slowly. He knew the place as a schoolboy knows the old school to which he returns after a blissful holiday. He had had a pleasant time in England. The year's leave was spent in the north of London with an uncle, who was living with his wife in comfortable retirement after a fairly prosperous career in the city as manager for a firm. Basildon received a warm welcome from the childless couple. It was to their care he had been sent as a boy of ten; and it was through them that he had attended a big City school, where he had received an excellent education. The uncle had a great hope of him, and he had returned to the office with a great deal of confidence. But he had felt the office was a trap and deserted. The only lamp hanging on the wall in the hall of the entrance. It was intended as a guide for arrivals. She knocked at the office window but no one responded. The station yard was empty also.

She crossed the yard and passed out into the road through the open gateway. The station formed a terminus to the road, and the traveller had no choice of ways. If the car arrived she could not fail to see and hear it. The trees cast a network of shadows in the moon's light at her feet. Not a soul was in sight. A little distance down the road on the right was a low bungalow standing in its own grounds. A dim, yellow glimmer in the verandah showed that the place was inhabited. She regretted that she had not asked Basildon the way to the nearest hotel before she dismissed him so abruptly. There must be a hotel, she thought, near the station. Possibly the light she saw came from some house of the kind.

With a view to discover if this were so, she walked towards it and looked in at the entrance. The grounds were surrounded by a mud wall pierced by a gateway that owned no gate. No sign of a notice board was visible to indicate that the bungalow was otherwise than private.

Attracted by the moonlight and strangeness of her

credited .

Just as she reached the something lying in the road immediately before her moved, raising a little cloud of pale grey dust which whitened in the moonlight. Soft mottled wings were spread, and a night-jar flew away with a hurried rustle, uttering its metallic cry which sounded like a pebbie bounding across an expanse of smooth ice.

She stood still and listened, keenly alive to the fact that the night was full of muffled sounds. Beyond the shadow of the trees stretched the same interminable level country. Open spaces of dark grey soil and dry grass were patched with thorny scrub ; and as far as eye could see, the palmyra reared its stiff crown of leaves, and stood like a watchful sentry on outpost duty.

The road was broad and smooth. It ran in a straight line without curve or undulation as far as she could see. There was no fear of losing the way, and she was tempted yet further afield. The light from a moon that was in its second quarter flooded the landscape and whitened the thorny scrub that edged the broad skirts of the road.

Suddenly a long melancholy wail rose at no great distance on her left. Again she was startled. She stopped to listen, wondering if it came from some animal or human being in distress. It was echoed by another cry, this time on her right, where there was a bit of dry





near, the car failing to appear, received he felt that such an offer would be able; for she refused to admit that she was a woman in a strange land likely to need assistance. As he himself had already put it, he would have done the same for a coolie woman who required help.

After standing a short space in doubt, during which he watched her disappear through the door on to the platform, he departed, followed by his pcon and a couple of porters bearing his luggage. He made his way to the bungalow near to the station.

Although Margery had seen no notice board on the gateway, the building was public, and known as the travellers' bungalow. It served as hotel and refreshment-room: but it fell far short of either from a European's point of view in its furniture, its fittings, and its catering. As to cellar or larder, it boasted of neither. The room in the centre, lighted only by the doorways, was a dining-, drawing-, and sitting-room in one.

The bungalow was in charge of an old man, in years gone by a gentleman's servant. On the arrival of a traveller he procured the necessary food from the nearest bazaar, and charged him with the separate items at the current market price. The visitor was expected to bring his own bedding and dressing-room requisites; also the liquor he required with his dinner. The bungalow

education. His father had one day putting the boy into a school where he himself had risen ; but Basildon's father willed it otherwise. He wanted his only child to come back to him in India.

"Your father is jealous of us ; that's the truth of it," said his uncle, with some bitterness, for the boy had been like a son to him.

"I wonder what he expects you to do when you get there ; enlist like himself?" said his aunt. "That was a mistake on his part. He ought to have done much better for himself, like your uncle."

"I am to go to an engineering college out there and get an appointment under Government in the Department of Public Works ; so he says in his letter."

"Well! all I can say is, come back to us if things are not what you like. There's always a welcome here, my boy," rejoined his uncle.

"My father did well in the line he chose," remarked Basildon, jealous for the good name of his parent.

"I don't deny it ; and he has finished by being barrack-sergeant. His father, a well-to-do farmer in Lincolnshire, would have been better pleased, seeing that there was no war to make any call upon him, if he had either remained on the land or gone into business like me. However, we'll say no more about it. What's done is done ; and since he has called you back, back

c  
4

"you must go. All I wish you to remember is, don't forget that you've got a home in England whenever you need one."

So the boy rejoined his father in India; and now, fifteen years later, he returned to the home so generously offered and was not disappointed. He was received like a son and felt like a son of the house.

India has a great civilizing influence on the Englishman of the middle class. The mere fact of having servants and workpeople under his control induces a self-respect and dignity that is not to be found in men of the same class at home. Basildon's bearing impressed his relatives; it was that of one who was accustomed to command. They introduced him with some pride to a large circle of friends. He was thus brought into contact with a community of well-educated, refined English women who were contented with town life. Their ambition went no further than a well-appointed home within reach of the theatres and shopping centres of the metropolis. They were different from the people he had travelled with, and had entirely different interests. Their husbands and sons went up to the City every day and nobody troubled about the particular business in which the men were employed.

His journey out brought him in contact with another set of people whose tone of thought was not quite the same, and whose talk was of a world he knew only from the outside. It was a world hedged round with red tape and officialism, a world that drew a strong line between the superior and inferior branches of the services.

As he approached the bungalow a tall dignified native greeted him with a ceremonious salaam. The man wore a closely folded turban, a tussore silk coat and a loin cloth of the finest white muslin with a narrow border of crimson silk.

"Suriya!" said Basildon, his thoughts of home and of his life on board ship scattered to the winds.

"I heard your honour was expected by the mail train from Tuticorin, and I have come to give you a welcome back to India."

Basildon knew the ways of the country as well as its

language. Not for a single second was he deceived by the words of welcome. That Suriya had some object in view he was certain; it would declare itself in time. Meanwhile he invited him to walk into the verandah where they could chat while the dinner was being prepared.

The daylight died much more quickly under the eaves of the low verandah than on the railway platform, where Margery sat watching the gorgeous colours of the setting sun. In the deepening shadows Suriya looked keenly at the Englishman. He opened the conversation by asking several inconsequent questions as to the rail journey and the voyage. He beat about the bush after the manner of a Hindu who has something of importance to communicate.

Basildon gave no sign of his curiosity having been raised. He allowed the conversation to flow on without interruption in any channel his companion might choose. Finally Suriya said—

“You are going to Sirraloor, sir?”

“I have to take over charge from Carvalho tomorrow morning.”

“Have you heard from Mr. Enville?”

“No; I shall learn the news as soon as I get to camp—quite soon enough for me.”

Basildon spoke indifferently. There was no reason why he should centre his thoughts upon the work until it became his business officially.

“I shall be glad if you will let me say a little word.” Suriya became confidential and a little mysterious in his manner.

“What is it?” asked Basildon, still without curiosity.

“Last year after you left the rains were heavy and the flood washed away part of the road at the end of the bridge. The Chief Engineer gave an order for the mending of the bridge and the remaking of the road. To strengthen it and prevent the same accident happening again, the road is to be carried over a new line that will raise it out of reach of any future flood.”

“Has the alignment been altered?”

“Yes, sir, slightly. If you remember the road turned

at a sharp angle where it joined the bridge. The new road is to be taken in a straight line from the bridge; a new pier will be added and the bank of the river will be faced with stone.

"I always thought that something of the kind would have to be done on a count of the wearing away of the river bank at this point. Don't the villagers like it?"

Suriya's eyes were fixed on Basildon in a curious penetrating gaze. They were unusual eyes for a native of India. The iris was a hazel brown flecked with russet, and the large black pupil shone out distinctly. In the eyes of most natives in the south the iris is of too deep a shade to allow of the black pupil to be distinguished.

"They are glad to have the road mended; but they don't like the new alignment. You will remember, sir, that a neem tree with a double stem stands by the side of the road near this bridge. In making the extension on the new line the neem will have to be cut down, as the new road must pass right over the spot where the tree grows."

"And what is the objection? why should it not be taken over the place?"

"The neem tree is dedicated to an amma, a female demon, which is supposed to take up its residence in it; and it is held sacred. The people believe that the river will eat up the whole village if the tree is cut down."

"What does Mr. Envide say about it?"

"He makes light of it at one time. At another he gets angry."

"What about Over-seer Carvalho?"

"He says he is going away and it does not matter to him. The order has been given to cut it down and there's the trouble. The village waits for your return, as the people believe that you understand them better than Carvalho. The headman has asked me to speak to you, although I am not a worshipper of the amma."

Basildon understood the situation without further explanation. Suriya was of a higher caste than the inhabitants of the village and a votary of Vishnu, whose trident was marked on his forehead. A contemptuous note crept into his tone when he spoke of devil worship:

he looked upon it as something infinitely beneath him. All the same he wished to stand well with the people. Once a year a festival was held at a temple in the district. The offerings brought by the pilgrims were not to be despised. Suriya was the mahunt, or head, of the mutt or board of trustees who controlled the property and revenues of the temple. It was to his interest that these should be large. In conjunction with the members of the mutt he rendered accounts yearly. They were accepted without criticism, no one venturing to dispute the figures or ask for vouchers for the same.

Suriya would not have troubled himself about the tree unless it had been made worth his while. The people had placed themselves in his hands and were prepared to pay the price should he succeed ; and he had another reason for interesting himself in their affairs and exercising an influence among them.

There was a pause, during which he leaned forward and let his eyes rest in a peculiar manner upon his companion. In the half light they seemed to grow supernaturally large and to send out the pale green glow that may be seen in the eyes of an animal. In former days Basildon had more than once felt himself vaguely uncomfortable under the fire of that gaze. The sensation returned suddenly and without warning. He moved his chair slightly, lowered his eyes and raised them again as though to shake himself free of the impression. Suriya continued—

“You will do your best for us, sir ? It is believed by the whole village that you will find a way out of the trouble.”

The soft persuasive tones came almost as if he heard them in a dream.

“Of course, of course ! Tell the people that I will try to save their tree, though how it is to be done I don't know.” He relapsed into silence. The cool night wind blew softly through the crisp foliage of the banyan tree ; and the greedy cry of the large berry-eating bats, the flying foxes of the plains, sounded overhead. Basildon roused himself. “I suppose the rebuilding of the bridge is nearly done,” he said.

Suriya described the work. The massive pier was finished as well as the repairs to the bridge; but a delay had occurred in placing the girders in position which were to link up the bridge with the village. The interruption was in the making of the road and the preparation of the river bank. The stone and concrete and cement were all lying ready to hand and the foundations were dug, but no further advance could be made until the tree was felled and the devil-stone with its primitive altar, where innumerable generations had made blood sacrifices to the demon, was cleared away. The gangs of workmen imported to do the work, themselves devil worshippers although not devotees of that particular demon, had struck work. Their fears had been roused by the villagers to such an extent that they had flung down their tools declaring that they dared go no further.

As Suriya talked the rapid twilight of the tropics merged into night. The bungalow servant brought the lamp into the centre room and began to lay the cloth for dinner.

From the verandah the road that passed the bungalow was plainly visible. Basil don's eyes were idly fixed on the open gateway. His thoughts, lulled in some strange fashion to unusual torpidity, were occupied vaguely with plans for the removal of the tree without hurting the prejudices of the people. No one knew better than himself how easily trouble might arise. The Indian bazaar is a hotbed of rumour and fanaticism; the spirit of rioting once roused might be fanned into a wide-spread conflagration under the breath of extravagant tales that had no foundation.

Gradually the torpidity passed; and his brain, as if released from a spell, became active. Margery Longford entered his thoughts and he recalled the fact that he had not heard the motor-car pass. The sound of its horn could not possibly have escaped his ear. She must, therefore, still be waiting at the station. His inclination in spite of his discouraging attitude at their parting was to go and seek her.

Suriya ceased speaking of the bridge, aware that he



had lost the attention of his listener. He began to talk on another subject.

"There is something I should like to ask you, sir. The newspapers tell us a good deal ; but it is said that they hide more by order of the Government. In the bazaars it is reported that the great English War Lord has given orders that nothing but victories are to be spoken of. Is it so ?"

"It is not true. We are told exactly what happens at the front, and on the field of battle ; no order of the kind has been given."

"Another tale coming from Bombay, where they have the very latest news by wire from England, says that our Indian troops have all broken caste. If they had not broken caste they would have died of starvation."

"It is not true," repeated Basildon, with some irritation. "You ought not to listen to such rumours."

"I can quite understand that the stories may be false ; but the people cannot read the English newspapers, and they have no time to study their own. They prefer to listen to the men who travel from village to village on purpose to carry news. This is what they are saying. It is also ascertained that many of the English war ships are sunk and that before long India will be under a foreign rule which will give the people self-government."

"Nonsense !" said Basildon, rising from his chair. "It is all false. Those tale-bearers ought to be put in jail."

Suriya rose also, knowing that the movement was intended to show him that the interview was at an end.

"I shall come and see you to-morrow, sir ; and I will bring the headman with me," he said, as he put his hand to his forehead in salutation.

"By all means bring him after I have taken over charge ; I can do nothing before."

Suriya glanced sharply at Basildon, whose attention had again wandered, and left the verandah. As he stepped down on to the path he caught sight of a figure passing the open gateway. Basildon also saw it and recognised Margery.

As soon as the mahunt had disappeared, Basilton took up his hat and stick and strolled down to the entrance. He was right in his conjecture: the car had not come and she was passing the time by taking a walk into the country—not a safe proceeding by reason of the snakes. He must warn her even at the risk of a second snub for his pains.

He arrived at the gateway and looked out. He decided to follow and went as far as the last tree. Still diffident about dogging her foot-steps he remained in the black shadow of its trunk. Presently the pack of jackals gave tongue. In another minute the white figure came flying towards him, fear written unmistakably on her face.

"Miss Longford! what is the matter?" he asked in sudden apprehension that some harm had befallen her.

She stopped close to him and, to his astonishment, slipped a hand in his arm, dignity, reserve and staid-offishness completely gone. How glad she was to see him again he little knew!

"Oh! that dreadful howling! what was it?"

"Jackals; they won't hurt you. What are you doing out here? Looking for the car?"

"I was tired of sitting still at the station. The machine hasn't come and I was wondering if there was any means of cabling for it."

She spoke breathlessly, and he knew that she had received a slight shock. The hand on his arm trembled in spite of her endeavour to regain her self-possession.

"I don't know if you can wire. We might find out at the station. The difficulty is at the Sitaloor end. It is not safe for you to be wandering about after dark," he added as he walked by her side towards the station. She did not withdraw her hand from his arm and he was well content that it should rest there.

"I thought you said just now that the jackals were harmless."

"So they are. I was thinking of the snakes that come out of the jungle at night and cross the road. It is so easy to tread on one. You should carry a stick to beat the ground like this."

He suited the action to the words and struck the ground sharply with his walking-stick.

"I ought not to be frightened. I've heard coyotes call; but they are different from jackals. Is there anything else to scare one in this strange country?"

"Nothing at all," he replied, with some amusement; it was not the same Miss Longford who had awed him on board ship. "And you need not be afraid of the snakes if you take proper precautions and keep out of their way."

"No tigers nor panthers nor bears hanging round among the palms?"

"They have all been driven away ever so long ago by the railroad, much to the disgust of sportsmen. Listen! There's a man coming up behind. Do you hear how he beats the ground with a ferruled rod as he jogs along at a slow trot?"

They waited at the entrance of the station yard; and when the panting traveller reached them Basildon asked him in his own tongue where he was going. He received a voluble reply. At the end of it the man unfolded the end of his turban and took out a note.

"He says," explained Basildon; "that the car has had an accident. No one is hurt; but Mr. Envile finds it impossible to send it to-night. The man has brought a letter from Mrs. Envile which will probably tell you what to do."

They went inside the station verandah where the wall-lamp enabled Margery to read the note. After describing the accident that had temporarily laid up the car, and lamenting over her inability to keep her promise of sending it, Josephine Envile directed Margery to go to the travellers' bungalow for the night. The man in charge was an old servant of her husband's bachelor days. He would look after her comfort and tell her what to do. The car would call for her in the morning.

"But where is the travellers' bungalow?" asked Margery, a little aghast at the sudden and unexpected turn of events.

"It is the bungalow you passed just now, the

only house near the station. The town is a mile distant."

"Is there no hotel in the town?"

"There isn't a single European house in the place. The travellers' bungalow is the only building an Englishwoman—or man for the matter of that—could put up in."

He went out into the station yard and blew a whistle. In answer to it Nellappa came running from the bungalow. The peon was directed to bring Miss Longford's luggage with the help of the porters to the bungalow.

"I have told my man to look after your things; we need not wait."

"I won't trouble you any further; I know my way," said Margery, with more gratitude and friendliness than she had ever shown before.

"I am stopping at the bungalow myself," he said; then, seeing her perplexity, he added "a curious fate over which we have no control throws us into each other's company. As the natives would say, what the gods decree no man can alter, so we had better make the best of it."

"I suppose so," was the only reply she had ready. She was a little surprised to find that she was rather pleased on the whole to be once more obliged to accept his assistance and companionship.

## CHAPTER V

BASILDON and his companion walked back to bungalow in silence, Margery trying in vain to introduce some kind of order into her chaotic state of mind. The situation that had arisen was entirely novel and contrasted to all previous experience. The remarkable part about it was the dominant feeling of gratification at his meeting him again. According to her principles she could not have resented her dependence on another. Instead of resentment she was conscious of gratitude, of pleasure in his companionship. Her former stiff and reserved manner vanished, and she allowed herself to be gay and natural. Basildon was sensible of the change, although he could not have said what it was. It was when he first felt that trembling touch upon his arm which appealed to his protective manhood as no woman could have done. The veil between them of misunderstanding was torn aside once and for all ; and his heart quickened as he glanced at the figure by his side.

At the foot of the steps they encountered Sir Basil, who had not left the premises in spite of his ceremonial leave-taking. His eyes fastened on Margery with penetrating curiosity in which was a shadow of surprise. He had known the Englishman for many years as a bachelor, rigidly adhering to his work and unattracted by women even of his own nationality.

Margery caught the mahunt's glance. His observant grey eyes swept him up and down. She wondered if he were the old servant Mrs. Enville had mentioned. In her ignorance his dress conveyed nothing. Concluding that it could be no one else she said—

“ I wish to stay here for the night. Mrs. E

tells me that you will provide me with everything I want."

This was not exactly what was written in the letter, but Margery had read it to mean as much. Suriya saw the mistake that had been made, and drew himself up with some indignation. He! a caste man! a venerated mahunt! to be taken for a pariah servant! Fortunately, Basildon stepped in in time to check the insolent disavowal.

"The bungalow servant is inside, Miss Longford. This is a native—gentleman," he added after a slight hesitation, "who has come to see me on business."

The title, gentleman, was fully comprehended by the mahunt, and it served its purpose of mollifying him, although he by no means forgave the unintentional insult. As she turned away and hurried up the steps, Basildon explained that the lady had never been in India before. The scowl disappeared. Whatever a native may think, he is careful to hide his thought from a European.

"She is a friend of yours, sir, and I am but the dust under her feet," he said in English.

It was a figuratively polite speech which Basildon understood was intended to intimate the fact that the offence was forgiven. Suriya salaamed once more and departed, this time for good. As he passed out of the gateway, the scowl returned. Meanwhile Margery was making her first acquaintance with the interior of a dāk bungalow.

"Is this the dining-room?" she asked, as Basildon joined her; her eyes were upon the dinner-table that was set for one.

"It is the only sitting-room," he replied. He called the old man from the kitchen, and ordered him to lay another place. "This lady will dine and sleep here."

"Any ayah got? and sheets and blankets and pillow-cases?" asked the matey, blinking at Margery with smoke-inflamed eyes.

She made no answer, and he ran back to the den behind the bungalow that served as kitchen and private, living, sleeping, and dressing-room for himself. Just

now it was redolent of wood smoke, fried onions grilled chicken.

Margery looked after his retreating figure, and turned to Basildon with a question in her eyes. She understood what she would say.

"Let me show you where to find the dressing-room. The waterman will bring you some hot water. Help you——;" he hesitated; it seemed strange that he should be obliged to make such inquiries, yet it was necessary for her comfort. "Have you soap and towel with you? Nothing is provided in a dāk bungalow but the bare furniture; and of that there is the smallest possible quantity."

The bedroom opened off the centre room. It contained nothing but a cot with mattress and pillow. It had the appearance of having been used by the presiding genius of the kitchen. In the adjoining dressing-room was a folding camp-table, a small looking-glass, and two chairs. The bath-room beyond contained another camp-table on which was an enamelled iron basin. This was by way of being a washstand. The dressing-room was lighted by an old-fashioned tumbler lamp—a floating wick in a pool of dark oil. The floors were covered with coarse bamboo matting, and the walls were whitewashed. Just above the lamp, a yellow lizard clung to the wall. It was out for a feast on the insects attracted by the light.

Margery had been in many huts and shacks of this kind in her own wild country; but never had she seen a more depressing, desolate building than this. The thought of spending the night on the bare mattress in such a place made her shudder.

She returned to the dining-room. Another place had been laid and the old man was bringing in two plates of muligatawny soup. She seated herself, and Basildon took the chair opposite. She could have smiled at her own expense as she looked across at him. Here was the man with whom she had refused to lunch. She was under the impression that she had parted with him for ever; and she found herself sitting down uninvited to a dinner in a place where no other white people existed.

Suddenly a thought crossed her mind which bewildered her, and she asked—

"Are you staying the night here, too?"

"I thought of continuing my journey after dinner," he replied, glancing at her curiously.

She was not sure whether the answer afforded her relief or not.

"Is there any one living in this bungalow besides the old man and the waterman?"

"No one; and the two servants don't live in the house. They have their rooms outside."

"Then I shall be the only occupant of the house!" she cried in consternation, almost wishing now that he had said he intended to remain.

"I am afraid so; but there is nothing to fear. You are as safe here as you would be in the Galle Face Hotel. You may hear the jackals cry again; and you mustn't mind if a—a mouse runs across your room. Take no notice of anything you see or hear."

He had in his mind the more than probable bandicoot when he mentioned the word mouse. Then there were the mosquitoes. It was not a pleasant prospect he admitted to himself.

"Oh!—but I can't stay here alone! I really can't! The place looks so weird and spooky; and that dreadful old mattress and pillow are too terrible for words. I shall sit up all night in this room; and that old man must come and sit with me. If those jackals give tongue in the middle of the night, I shall be just scared to death."

"You need not be. I wonder if I might make a suggestion."

She looked at him expectantly. Would he offer to stay with her? What would Josie say to such an arrangement? It was all her fault! She might have sent a pony trap, or even a bullock cart! It was a shame to leave her stranded like this! Basildon waited.

"I shall be only too glad to consider anything that will show me a way out of the difficulty. If the distance wasn't so great I would walk to Sirraloor. The thought of staying here by myself is appalling."



This time she gave him an appealing though he were her last hope of salvation. The dependence of a woman upon him again Basil don's pulse. Whatever it might be for for him an entirely new situation.

"I am going to Sirraloor myself. If you object to driving the ten miles with me, I shall be too delighted to offer you a seat in my cart. I have a wheeled bamboo dog-cart, and the horse is a cob."

The details about the cob and the cart meant nothing to her mind. She hailed the offer as a splendid means of escaping a night that would be lonely. She had no wish to be thought a coward; all she found it impossible to conceal her joy at such a solution to her dilemma. An immense load was removed from her mind. She would have accepted and gratefully an offer of a drive the whole night. As it was, he explained, the journey would take two hours, and they might reasonably hope to reach Sirraloor some time between nine and ten o'clock.

In her relief at escaping a lonely night, she found a new and unexpected side to her character. She smiled and laughed as she had never done before in his presence. Never had he seen her in such good spirits nor had he found her so charming and friendly. At the end of dinner they were on excellent terms. Her previous attitude towards him were dissipated. He was satisfied at last that she knew no other position in India.

On the other hand, the reserve he had shown on board ship disappeared; and Margery for the first time caught a glimpse of the true man hidden beneath his shell. She discovered to her surprise that he was a very pleasant companionable person. His appeal strongly to her American temperament.

The cart came round to the verandah and stopped at the table. The matey brought coffee and a document that contained some curious names and quaint spelling.

"Is that all?" she exclaimed as she contr





very early this morning to inspect the old part of the bridge." She stopped before her deerling and called "Daffie! Daffie!"

A fair child in white came bounding toward them. She offered her hand to Margery, and lifted her face to be kissed by her mother. "And a male child on 'em, whether a white or brown, as soon as the mother or father elvers. It has been said that there are no young people in the last; they are children and women whatever their size may be. Daffie looked at Samnee in a patronizing way, and the boy raised his hand to his forehead.

"Good boy, Samnee," was Daffie's condescending acknowledgment, and straightway she turned her back on him, ignoring his presence from that moment.

They strolled through the grove of banyan trees and came out on to the high river bank.

"It's glorious! magnificent!" cried Margery, as she gazed across the great wide bed of grey sand. "It was touched with lights of pale gold caught from the rays of the morning sun. A narrow silvery ribbon of water meandered in countless windings over the sand. It crossed the river bed above the bridge and flowed close under the high bank on which the village stood. The river was a dangerous neighbour even in the dry season. Calm and innocent as it looked now, the current was strong in places; and it lapped at the loose soil as though it would eat it away at the smallest encouragement.

The new pier to hold the girders had been built, as Sunita had explained; but the communication between the village and the old bridge was incomplete. The work was at a standstill owing to the difficulty over the removal of the tree. Travellers who had occasion to cross the river drove or walked through the sand and were ferried over the stream in conical skin-covered circular boats of wicker-work that were propelled by poles like punts.

"What an enormous bridge! It must be half a mile long," said Margery, as she pressed forward to the waving pampas grass that grew on the slope of the bank.

"It is all that and a little more."

"Why is it so long?"

"Because with a heavy monsoon the river fills its bed from bank to bank. You will scarcely believe me when I tell you that I have seen the water as high as the top of the arches. I remember three years ago Guy had a terribly anxious time. Some of the arches were actually submerged, and he feared that the whole structure would give way. Fortunately, there was very little *débris* washed down from the mountains that season; and so the bridge had nothing but the pressure of the water to withstand."

"It must be a magnificent sight. How often does the flood come down?"

"Twice a year, in November and December, and in July and August. The ryots get two crops a year off the land that is under wet cultivation; that is watered by irrigation canals. The worst floods occur in July, when we have scarcely a drop of rain here."

"When do you expect it to be on show. I must see it if I die for it!"

Josie laughed at her slang. She loved the American touch; it took her back to happy school hours.

"This is the end of September. It may come any day, or it may be six or eight weeks. By November at the latest the monsoon, if it is coming at all, will have broken; and one morning we shall wake and see the water surging down like the Nile, a brown flood bringing wonderful fertility with it. We all heave a great sigh of relief when it comes, and feel happy in the assurance that there will be no famine nor failure of crops for that season."

"Are there to be arches where the new pier stands?"

"No; Guy decided that it would not be safe. The current is strongest just close under the bank near the village. He has made that enormous pier—it is much larger than it looks from here—and the road will be carried across on girders just like a modern railway bridge."

"It rather spoils the appearance of the old bridge

not to have the extension match. What is that squat little building down there?" asked Margery, pointing to a small brown temple with a cube tower not more than twenty feet high. It stood on a spit of land that jutted out towards the middle of the river.

"That's the temple of the river demon, the partner of the troublesome lady in the tree. The village people declare that the river spirit calls to his wife to join him just before the flood comes. Guy says it is the cry of a heron. He has heard it himself, a melancholy prolonged qua-a-a-a-k like a lost goshawk, overcome with grief. The bird knows that the rain is falling in the hills, and it is on its way to new feeding grounds: places that have been dry all the summer but will soon be swamps full of creepy crawly things that make nasty meals for the waders."

"Let's go down to the water."

"I don't like the sand," objected Daffie. "It gets into my shoes. I want to find Daddy. He said he was coming back by the tree."

"It's hot down there even at this early hour, and not over clean," said Josie. "As soon as you get among the tufts of pampas grass you lose the breeze; and Daffie is right about the sand; it's so fine, it penetrates everywhere. Come and look at the pier in the road."

They turned to the left and followed a path that ran along the top of the river bank. Sunnes glanced after them as if in two minds. He loved the warm sand, and was pleased rather than otherwise to get away from the breeze that blew cold on his unprotected little body. Margery and her friend had forgotten his very existence, but Daffie turned and glanced at him. Although she did not deign to take any notice whatever of him, she did not forget his presence nor the steady stare of his admiring eyes; she would have liked him to follow, always keeping at a respectful distance.

The fascination of the warm sand to the child of the sun proved stronger than the lure of yellow hair and a pink and white skin. He watched them as they strolled toward the new road and then turned down the narrow track that led to the river bed. He was

familiar with it in all its aspects, mornin sunset. Sometimes he had a companion boy, but more often he went alone. Pur minute he returned in time for the meal at sunset without fail.

It was strange how the creatures of th tolerated his presence. Large lizards, out picnic among the insects, did not stir. Possibly the throbbing of their horny thro slightly and the wrinkled eyelids quivered not move. A harmless rat snake lying un of a tuft of pampas grass withdrew a curv long body, and the head that rested on th slightly as the boy walked by; but nei snake showed sign of fear. His hand wa of God's creatures, and they seemed to kn

He reached the bottom of the slopin stream ran between him and the island temple stood. Stepping-stones enable wished to cross dry-footed to do so; but preferred to wade through the shallow w delighted in the broad pool and spent mu paddling. At this time there was no dang being sluggish. He paddled for some min he was tired of it, he strolled on to the temple had no door, and the repulsive-look protruding eyes and large cruel mouth w was so placed that it looked up the riv uncouth face was an expression of expecta it were for ever waiting and hoping for its tale of victims—broken trees and herl primeval forests, dead buffaloes and goats, there a human being who had been caught asleep on the sand.

The child climbed up the steps, and a the image he crossed himself, just as his would have done. In addition she woul all her knuckles crack to ward off the evil spirit.

Poojah had recently been performed. a white cock with various other offerings

image. The child regarded them fixedly but made no attempt to touch the fruit and sweets that might have had their temptation.

As he stood there two men came up from the other side. One was Suriya; the other was the village poojaree, who also served as astrologer and caster out of devils, as well as doctor and general adviser to the village on the immediate future. As soon as their eyes fell on the boy the men stopped and looked at him with sudden interest. As he crossed himself they smiled and exchanged glances.

"Good boy!" said Suriya. "This is a fine place to sit. Rest here, little one."

He pointed to the top step that was just below the stone slab on which the offerings were arranged. The poojaree went behind the temple and returned with a yellow banana which he gave the child. Then they moved away, turning to look back at Suriya seated there with his back to the image. The ugly hunched face of the idol seemed to peer over the head of the child with a longing gaze towards the hills from which would soon come the waters that should lap at its feet and lay their offering where now the blood-stained cock's head rested.

"Salaam, little Rajah," said the poojaree mockingly, and yet with a strange seriousness.

They both salaamed and laughed. Sanner solemnly returned the salutation; his face was serious and without a smile.



## CHAPTER VII

MARGERY and Josie followed a path along the river bank. The morning breeze still cool. They reached the new road in confusion. It was finished from its junction beyond the village, and had been carried where the devil tree stood. There it ended. Not a single workman either imported or local had ventured with pick or shovel on the plot of ground overshadowed by the tree apart from the use of the amma.

Beyond this sacred place the bank fell down to the edge of the river. Huge blocks of gneiss, rough-hewn, and still sparkling where pick and adze had shaped the stone, were piled at a distance away. The iron girders necessary to build a bridge and link it up with the road were lying further back. A crane stood idle and its tools and baskets were stacked in a pile behind the D.P.W. bungalow. A watchman and a large night-bird near the crane warming themselves by the early sun. Everything was ready to commence but the amma cried "halt!" and each man stayed—stayed as if by magic. The decision of the powerful Trades-Union of the West could be more effective than the amma's unspoken word.

Josie, drawn by her little daughter, ran to the tree. It was an insignificant tree, a margosa or neem. Its ash-like foliage in bunches. In anticipation of the coming monsoon throwing out fresh green shoots and buds but later the sickly scent of its innumerable flowers would permeate the heavy air.

Daffie lifted her fascinated but awestruck eyes to the crowns of leafage.

"Oh, mummie! do you think we can see the devil? I would so like to have a peep at her," she said.

"No, dear! there is no devil—demon is its proper name; devil is not a nice word."

"Yann says there is a devil in the tree."

"When I tell you stories of fairies do you believe that the fairies really and truly live?"

"I don't know," replied Daffie, doubtfully. "Is the devil—I mean the demon—a fairy?"

Often as she had listened to tales told by her mother, as often had it been carefully explained that in these days there were no fairies. At the back of the child's mind—such is the instinctive credulity of the human being with regard to the occult—there lingered a suspicion that her mother might have made a mistake; that in the far past when stories were written of them, the fairies had once existed; and that they had only been banished. Somewhere in a vague and beautiful fairyland, out of reach of human eyes, they still danced in the moonlight and frolicked among the snowy cups of the arums and eucharis lilies.

"I should not call the demon a fairy," Mrs. Enville was saying.

"Is it a goblin?"

"Not exactly," replied Mrs. Enville, who was often somewhat puzzled by her little daughter's searching questions.

"Then Yann may be right," rejoined the child, quickly. "She says the amma comes into the tree sometimes. It comes when it is awake and hungry. She has never seen it because she is a Christian; but the village women see it. They say that we ought never to go near enough to the tree for the shadow to fall upon us; and we must keep our mouths shut or the amma will jump down our throats like a fly. There was a girl in the village no bigger than me, who walked under the tree after the sun had set. The amma flew down upon her and turned one of her eyes towards her nose and made her look fri-i-i-ghtful!"

Mrs. Enville's brow contracted. She determined to speak severely to the chattering old woman, who ought to have known her business better than to frighten her charge with village tales.

"Ayah ought not to repeat such nonsense; she knows it is not true," said Josie.

"She didn't say it to me. I heard her telling Sunnee when she thought I was asleep. I was only pretending. Does the amma fly like a flying-fox or a bird?"

While Josie combated the spirit of primitive superstition in her little daughter, Margery was unconsciously feeling the touch of that same spirit in her own soul. Mysticism walks abroad everywhere in the East and lays a finger on all who are sensitive to nature. The eyes of the American girl were drawn to the river which seemed to possess a personality of its own. In size and breadth it reminded her of the rivers of her own continent. Yet in character it differed widely and fundamentally. It was a river of the plains unmarked by falls or wild inaccessible banks. Its potentialities were latent; they were masked by a deceptive gentleness and quietude. Instead of thrusting and bursting its way in noisy foaming rapids towards its goal, it glided with the silence of the snake. None the less surely it pursued its way over the sunlit bed in obedience to the call of the sea.

Its personality seemed to include some of the attributes of the deities of its country. It contained within itself the power of good and evil. In one hand it brought fertility to the parched and withered land rendered sterile by the fierce rays of the sun. In the other it carried destruction. The tons of earth that formed its banks and pretended to set a boundary to its channel, melted before the lapping of its tide. The bridge astride its flood had crumbled under silent pressure. Huge blocks of masonry, the strength and pride of the structure, had been detached and overturned, as the volume of water simply leaned against pier and embankment. The blocks had been rolled down the waterway like pebbles and thrown up on the shallows a quarter of a mile away.

Margery's eyes rested on the unfinished pier which

like a tower from its foundation. The current was n by some mysterious attraction to follow a ng channel between the village and the pier.

country interprets for itself the workings of e according to its knowledge or ignorance of : and effect. The scientist of the West could have : an accurate explanation of the river's obedience certain law of nature ; but his interpretation would ave appealed to the villager to whom science was own. The villager attributed the action of the s to the spirits that he believed rode upon those s. The amma called to her mate ; and in response immoned the waters and came riding joyously upon olume to her outstretched arms.

and now these strange English people in their lness to the ways of the Indian gods demanded the wal of the amma ! Where would she next take up bode if driven from her tree ?

Vhether far or near, there would the river at the ing of its spirit assuredly follow, sweeping all e it at the word of him who rode its flood. Piers, ankments, roads, villages would crumble and melt re the turgid waters, just as the loose earthen banks ed at the lapping of the stream. Could any human g stay the progress of the gods or turn them from ' purpose ?

The pier that was to complete the bridge stood in ary dignity surrounded with its scaffolding and boo ladders. From the bridge itself stretched the arms of the girders that were to link up with those g near the amma's tree. They looked like bare s denuded of flesh betokening a broken back. The tering busy workpeople, men, women and children, had lately swarmed over the bridge were idle ; wading birds paddled undisturbed in the stretches shallow water ; and kingfishers perched on the boo scaffolding waiting for the silvery flash of es that would bring the speckled birds like stones he water.

As Margery looked down on water and pier and ge, two figures issued from behind the masonry and

walked towards the stream. They glanced up at the pier and stood beneath its shade, as a round coracle punted by a native floated towards them. They stepped into the primitive boat and were ferried across.

She recognized Enville and Basildon; and as her eye rested on the latter her pulse quickened. One of the many pathways used by the village women for fetching water led up to the place where she stood. They took it. Enville walked in front doing most of the talking and his companion followed silently.

She advanced to meet them as they reached the top. Enville shook hands and gave her a morning greeting; but Basildon dropped back and stopped before he was near enough to be offered a hand. He lifted his hat as his eyes met hers. Then, with the military salute for Enville, which he had used the evening before, he turned away and was gone.

She glanced after his retreating figure with mixed feelings. This was the Anthony Basildon who had travelled with her on board ship, and had puzzled and sometimes piqued her by his strange reserve and retirement. She thought and hoped that the old reserve had been dismissed for ever during the drive of the previous night. Together, as they passed under that wonderful moonlight through an unknown and only dimly seen country, she believed that she had rent aside once and for all the veil that had hung between them. She flattered herself that she had penetrated his reserve and won his confidence, had made of him a friend instead of a distant acquaintance. She was stung by a vague sense of failure. Accustomed to act on her own initiative without considering conventionalities, she was tempted to follow him then and there with the same morning greeting she had given to Enville; but he disappeared so quickly that she was unable to carry out the impulse. She found herself meekly following Enville's lead as he walked towards the spot where his wife and little daughter stood.

He had plenty to say as they strolled along, and did not notice her mood. It was a relief to him to leave

the subject that had engrossed his and Basildon's attention as they examined the bridge, and to plunge into an account of the English people living at Madura, and in the district, whom he wished to introduce to his guest in course of time. He spoke of the motor-car which he hoped to have in use again in a few hours. They would have a drive that very afternoon. It was wonderful what the car was doing for the English in India; and for the matter of that for the rich natives as well. Friends were able to meet for golf and bridge and other amusements; and no man need complain that he was isolated and without society. The roads were fairly good and flat in those parts; and the distance to Madura could be covered comfortably in an hour and a half. He and his wife often went into the town for the day, driving over in the cool of the morning and returning at night after sunset.

Of the country and its people or of his work he made no mention. Josie had told her that he was interested in his profession. This was true; but like most Englishmen in India he did not expect the women of his nation to share that interest. They were there to take their part in the domestic arrangements, and in the burden of exile.

Another reason for silence in respect to his work was the disinclination to carry it home with him. He desired to leave all official troubles behind in the office. It was not always possible to do so. In the first place, his wife had a habit of asking questions. Secondly, anxieties, such as were caused by the apparently trifling removal of a devil tree, were apt to follow closely at his heels whether he liked it or not, and to obtrude themselves into the bungalow or the tent. He would have preferred in the present instance, if his wishes had been consulted, to have gone straight back to camp; but he saw his wife near the tree and could not very well pass by without stopping.

"I suppose you want to have a look at the bone of contention between us and the village people, Miss Longford. I am afraid you will be disappointed."

"I think not," said Margery, decisively. "India is

interesting me—some ; and so are you English ; and the way you do your work. I am beginning to think," she continued slowly ; "that you are all just a wee bit ashamed of work." Perhaps she had Basildon in her mind. "Now, we Americans—I am speaking of those in the West—have no such shame. We are proud of our commerce and of our professions and of our trade. In my eyes commerce ranks highest and takes precedence of the professions."

"Where do politics come in ?"

"A bad last. There's too much graft in our government to please me. I'd rather can fruit than be a political."

They stopped before the amma's tree. A low platform stood in front of it and on it was reared a dark stone, an oblong boulder set up like a badly shaped egg on its broad end. The stone was for the accommodation of the evil spirit, a means whereby the amma might materialize and enjoy the offerings brought by her votaries. It was black with many anointings of oil ; and over it hung a garland of oleander blossom, placed there by some votary that morning.

Daffie, clinging tightly to her mother's hand, glanced up with rounded eyes at the two crowns of foliage.

"Which tree does the amma live in when she is alive and real ?"

"There is no amma, dear," replied Mrs. Envile.

"Has the Devil, our own Devil, you knew, mummie, taken her back to Hell ?"

"Hush, Daffie ; I've just told you that there is no amma."

"But if there was an amma, which of these two trees would she sit in ? and would our Devil allow her to come into our Hell ?"

Mrs. Envile turned with relief to her husband.

"Well ! have you seen Overseer Basildon this morning ?"

"Yes ; I've just been showing him what we have done."

"And what does he say ?"

"He agrees with me in thinking that the work ought

to be pushed on without any delay. This is the tree, Miss Longford, that the village people are making such a fuss about. It must come down at once."

"Is there any great hurry?" asked Margery.

"We have no time to spare. If we have an early monsoon and the river rises——"

He stopped speaking as his eye fell on a group of natives standing at a little distance. They were watching him furtively. He noticed that they had no agricultural implements with them; that they wore nothing in the shape of a turban or covering to their bare shaven heads; and that their loins-cloths were bound tightly round their bodies as if for a long journey, or for some unusual and strenuous exertion. Many of them carried a bamboo staff from four or five feet in length. From the manner in which it struck the ground when lifted, Envile knew that the stick was loaded with lead, and that it required no great strength of arm to deal a blow with it that might mean death. He strolled towards them.

"Are you waiting to see me?" he asked.

Two or three, who were squatting on their heels, rose to their feet not daring to remain seated in the presence of the master bridge-builder; but they all wore a sullen expression. One of them replied that they were expecting the Overseer and that they wished to talk with him. Envile turned back to his wife, who was dividing her attentions between fencing a string of questions from her little daughter, and an endeavour to act as guide to her visitor.

"Margery, you ought to see the village women come up from the river with their waterpots. They are very picturesque." Josie looked up the road and then back towards the river. "I wonder where they are. I don't see one. It is very odd." She turned to her husband. "Guy! where are the village women and children? There are usually a number of them at this time on the road. Where are they?"

Envile did not answer the question. He too had noted their absence with some uneasiness. He had no wish to alarm his wife; but he was aware that when trouble was abroad the women of the East disappeared.



"Come along back to camp," he said, with a touch of impatience that hid his uneasiness. "I have had enough walking for this morning. It is tiring work tramping over the sand of the river bed."

Again Margery lingered with a backward glance. This time it was not the river that occupied her thoughts. If Josie had accused her of looking for Basildon she would have indignantly denied the imputation; but the fact remained, although she would not recognize it, that he was not far from her mind.

"Come along, Miss Longford," repeated Enville, who had his own reasons for avoiding a *tête-à-tête* with his wife. Like Daffie's, her questions might prove a little embarrassing to answer and less easily set aside.

Josie followed, her little daughter clinging yet more closely to her hand. The child's belief in the amma survived all her mother's attempts to subvert it, and she threw several backward glances upon the amma's abode as they moved away. The catechism was continued, her queries being prefaced with many "ifs."

It was not far to the camp; the path passed under the shade of trees. It was not like an English grove nor a forest of the wild West. The ground was parched and dry and strewn with dead leaves. What grass there was looked dead beyond recovery; but with the first burst of the rains it would vivify into the tenderest green. A flock of babblers, cheery, scrubby little brown birds, foraged among the dried vegetation for insects, chattering and jerking their tails as they made their breakfast on the foolish grubs seeking the warmth of the morning sun. A lizard had planted itself near the birds. Unconsciously the busy crew served as beaters and drove the terrified flies and grasshoppers into the open mouth of the motionless reptile.

At the approach of man the birds took a short flight and settled down again. The scornful lizard, with throat palpitating, waddled over the dead leaves following the birds to their new feeding-ground. The sound of its rustling footsteps startled Margery. She looked in the direction of the noise but could distinguish nothing; the lizard with an instinct of preservation had stopped and

remained motionless. Suddenly her eye was attracted by the throbbing throat, and she saw it. Its gaze was fixed upon her with keen observation. She became conscious that the scaly creature was closely watching her. The half-formed thought that it might be pleasant to come and sit under the shade of the big banyan trees during the heat of the day, was dissipated on the spot. Nor did it return when she caught sight of the regiments of giant black ants, each ant at least half an inch in length, that crossed her path in a march that never ceased from sunrise to sunset.

"Hallo! there's Warradaile!" cried Enville, as he came in sight of the camp. A motor-car stood near the large tent where the servants were busy laying the breakfast-table. The visitor advanced to meet them. "I thought he might come over to see me, after my letter. He will stay to breakfast," continued Enville, speaking to his wife.

"How nice! Margery, you will like him; one of the best!" said Josie, with an enthusiasm that was a trifle indiscreet, if she wished to establish a friendship between the unconventional woman of the New World and the conservative man of the Old.

Margery made no reply; but she looked at the Englishman who approached and summed him up with a generous critical glance. She approved of all that met her eye. His clean-shaven face and firm jaw, lean, but not angular, gave the impression of a strong, masterful temperament, qualified by the inherent kindness which lies deeply planted in the heart of the Briton.

The years spent in the Indian Civil Service had taught him many things necessary for a man to know who was expected to grasp the intricacies of governing a group of foreign nations; people sharing the same country, but racially inimical to each other. Besides being good to look at and pleasant to listen to, he was disposed to be friendly with the world in general. His world included women, children, and dogs.

Josie introduced her friend, and they sat down under the shade outside the tents. After her observations during the morning's walk, Margery was not sorry to

find that a camp carpet had been spread over the densely populated, so-called, grass ; and that the chairs had been placed well within its margin.

Presently, Enville carried Warradaile off to talk business, and Margery retired to her tent to prepare for breakfast. After breakfast, the two men again sat together in consultation. There were many matters to discuss. How far had the disaffection spread ? What pernicious agents were at work disseminating vague rumours among the people of reverse and disaster to the British arms, of the misuse of the Indian troops, and the breaking of their caste, with respect to their food, through the mismanagement of the Army Service Corps ?

"Some mischievous person has been assuring them that the English King and his family have fled to Canada ; and that London has been burned to the ground ; preposterous tales, but credited by the villagers," said Enville.

"We have the same stories going in Madura. The police are doing their best to trace the lies to the fountain-head ; but, so far, they have not been successful. We have no Teutons in the district. I don't know of a single man who might be suspected of pro-Germanism. What labour have you on the bridge ?"

"Some of it is from Trichinopoly ; but the men who handle the girders and work the cranes come from Bombay. Our men down South are willing enough ; but they haven't either the experience or the skill of these Bombay fellows, many of whom have been lascars on the big liners."

"Do they talk ?"

"What object could they have in stirring up sedition down South ?"

"They might be paid to talk."

"Their language is not the language of the South. They can manage to make themselves sufficiently understood to get the necessaries of life ; but they could not discuss politics with the villagers if they tried."

"Have there been any tales of the sacrifice of children to ensure the stability of the bridge ?" asked Warradaile.

"None whatever. We have been curiously free from rumours of that kind. The only trouble that has cropped up has been over the devil tree, but Mr. Overseer, who has just returned from leave, seems to think that he can set that right if I've him a free hand."

"But all he can give him a free hand, if you can trust him. I wish he could help us in the other matter, and find out the origin of the cult, for it's nothing less."

"I will ask him, if you like. He knows the language intimately, and he might pick up a hint among the people that would be useful to the police."

"By-the-by, would you like a few extra police sent down to help in case there should be a row?"

"I think not. I would rather see what Basil don can do first. It might raise suspicion, and put the culprit on his guard. If we can smooth over this devil-tree worry, the village will settle down to the work of sowing in their seed. Fortunately the busy time is just beginning, and they won't have much opportunity of taking themselves into turbulence."

"Are they near a riot?"

"There were no women about this morning."

"A bad sign. In this country, we always have to reckon with the budmash, the mischievous fellow who is out for loot under the guise of a grievance of some sort; he is not particular what it is." Warrmalee knocked the ashes out of his pipe and rose. "I'll leave you to write your letters, and go and have a chat with your wife."

He strolled off towards the big tent where Josie and Margery were sitting in long, restful camp-chairs under the fly.

"Have you and Mr. Envile pulled off your stunt to your satisfaction?" asked Margery, as he fixed his chair to his liking. The position he chose placed him opposite to Josie, and gave him a side view of Margery. Already he was noting, with appreciation her profile and the set of her neck.

"I beg your pardon; I didn't quite——" He paused and looked at her for an explanation. She laughed with a suspicion of mischief in her eye.

"I forget, you're English. Have you finished your

business to your satisfaction? I should have said. I suppose you came over on business?"

"And to see you and Mrs. Enville."

"You knew I was here."

"I mentioned that I was expecting a visitor last time Mr. Warradale drove over," explained Josie, apologetically.

"That's all right; I quite get you: I mean I understand," replied Margery, with a little laugh.

Josie, for once in her life, wished her friend would be a little less American in her expressions. Hours passed, and Margery talked like any English girl with but the faintest trace of an accent. Then came moments when she used a succession of Americanisms unconsciously and without reason. They were amusing, when there were no strangers present, but embarrassing when critical ears were listening. Warradale was conventional, and he liked his acquaintances to be cut after the orthodox pattern. He had never met any one like Margery before, and he was already beginning to find her personality interesting.

"Yes," he replied slowly, his eyes dwelling upon her face as she talked. A man's eyes will lead him into deeper waters than his ears. "Mrs. Enville told me that she was hoping to see a friend from America. I wonder how India will compare with your country."

"I'll tell you right here. It doesn't compare at all. It is a contrast all along the line, from you yourself, a political, down to that black angel babe, back yonder; from the rivers and trees, down to the bug-infested vegetation that, I suppose, calls itself grass. And that's the surest thing you know."

He did not approve, on principle, of slang, but there was something fascinating about the way she expressed herself. It was different from anything he heard in his social circle at Madura, where, by virtue of his appointment, he was no insignificant personage.

"You may change your opinion when you have seen more of India."

"I doubt it; I'll let you know honest if I do. I don't want to change it. I like contrasts, don't you?"

' I think I do '

"Of course you do. They react on each other, and season your life for you - one."

The tone in which she said the last word was inimitable, and Wacradalle threw back his head and laughed in pure enjoyment.

## CHAPTER VIII

BASILDON had a busy morning before him, he went quickly to the bungalow after leaving the building served as office and residence for him when he was not on duty elsewhere in the district. There were only two rooms available for him, and Carvalho, who had been acting for him, had to leave his wife and family with him.

Carvalho was country-born and of no great education. He had found himself in a very uncongenial situation at Sirraloor. In the first place there was no accommodation in the bungalow for his family. His wife lived at Madura, and he had to bear the expense of two establishments. The salary was very great; but neither was his income as much as he could do to keep both himself and his family had exhausted his credit, and was in a state of impecuniosity. In the second place Basildon's working were not his ways. The villagers were in letting him know that they preferred the Englishman to his. He was, therefore, going, and did not attempt to hide the fact that his official transfer was complete he gave a sudden start.

"I wish you well of your job," he said.

"Why do you say that? Do you think I am going to the rocks ahead?"

"Rocks! I can tell you this! There will be a great deal of trouble before you, no matter which way you go, and it won't be confined to this district. Disasters to the British arms——"

"Disasters! what do you mean?" asked Basildon, interrupting him sharply.

"You've read the papers——"

"Yes; but I've seen nothing to be alarmed at. Steady progress is being made. No one ever thought it was going to be an easy and brilliant walk-over."

"The papers only say what the censor allows. Rumour snaps her fingers at the censor and tells us the truth. It is unpleasant, but the music must be faced."

Carvalho repeated the rumours, including the mischievous story of the treatment of the Indian troops.

"Rumour is a liar!" exclaimed Basildon, angrily.

Carvalho shrugged his shoulders with an irritating smile.

"A matter of opinion. By all means let us try and persuade the people of India that the British are successful. Let us try and hide the fact that we have lost thousands upon thousands of soldiers, white soldiers whom the natives of this country have believed were unconquerable; that our Navy is destroyed; that our King-Emperor——"

"Stop!" cried Basildon, springing to his feet. "Who told you such a string of lies? Give me his name and I will ram them down his throat."

Carvalho glanced at his clenched fist in alarm. "I did not invent them," he said hastily.

Basildon looked at him squarely, a sudden suspicion darting through his brain.

"You are repeating them; and, if I am not mistaken, you believe them, which is almost as bad as inventing them."

"There is no harm in repeating what is known to every man in the South but yourself," said Carvalho, in an injured tone.

"Who first spoke of them?"

"How can I remember? It may have been the headman, or one of the peons, or—or—— Hang it, man! I've talked about it with lots of people. It's no secret either here or in Madura, where many worse stories are afloat in the bazaar."

"Well, I advise you to drop it," said Basildon, more quietly. "It is playing with fire to help to circulate such tales out here in India. The people believe anything they are told; the more impossible the story, the



more it is credited. We shall have quite enough trouble over this confounded tree business without adding to the fire of rebellion by false tales of disaster. Don't forget that it takes very little to raise the spirit of riot and loot among the young men of the towns and villages, whose education has made them discontented with their lot and disinclined to follow their fathers' callings."

"Yes, I know all that ; but the mischief is done, and I can tell you this, the people are more interested in the devil tree than in the war. If the tree is cut down—and I don't see how it can be saved short of a miracle—there will be the deuce of a riot, not only in the village but in the district."

Basildon did not reply immediately. Presently he asked—

"Can Suriya give us any help in the matter?"

"Not he. I hate that man with the snaky eyes. All the same it might be advisable to get him on your side."

"He is quite ready to help. I feel sure he will do his best to pacify the people if others don't stir them up with false rumours."

Carvalho ignored the warning note sounded yet again, as though the other still had his suspicions.

"I don't trust men with eyes like his," he said.

Basildon had lived long enough in India to be aware that there were men who possessed a mysterious power over the wills of others, and he knew that they were feared. He had never come under the influence of this occult power himself, and did not believe it possible that he could be affected ; but it was probable that Carvalho might feel it. He had actually known of cases among the natives where certain actions could only have been attributed to a strong and baneful will superimposed upon the weaker will of the actor.

"His eyes are peculiar," he admitted ; "but I never heard of his exercising any strange power over others. It is only a very weak character who could be influenced against his will."

"How much do you know of him?"

"Very little," admitted Basildon.

"I've seen a good deal of him lately, more than I like. He turns up at all sorts of odd times. The old sadhu, who looks after the tree and the river temple, has also been here frequently, making blood sacrifices to the amma."

Basildon could account for the antipathy between the caste native and the man with mixed blood in his veins. The former had an inherent contempt for the latter, and the latter knew it.

"I don't mind how many goats and cocks they kill. It is their way of appeasing the demon, as they suppose, and of saving their own skins from accident and disease."

"The sacrifices are all right as long as they keep to the animals." Carvalho leaned over the office table which Basildon had been tidying as he talked and lowered his voice to a whisper. "Do you know what the talk of the village is about the bridge?"

"The usual thing, I imagine," replied Basildon, with signs of impatience, as he shut and locked the drawers in which the various papers handed over by Carvalho were stored away; "that Government means to sacrifice a dozen children and bury them at the foot of the new pier. I never knew a bridge of any size built for road or railway without some such rumour. Sometimes it gets into the papers; but if possible it is kept out. The story dies a natural death and no harm is done."

"This time it is not Government who is to do it. We should not need to trouble about it at all in that case. The story is that the people themselves intend to make the sacrifice; and the person who has suggested it and is urging them on is that fellow——"

The name died on his tongue. Some instinct caused him to glance round. In the doorway stood the very man he was about to mention. Suriya raised his hand to his forehead in polite salutation. A smile was on his lips, and his eyes gleamed with curious greeny-brown tints in a manner that sent a cold chill down Carvalho's spine.

As Basildon met the eyes he was conscious for the

first time in his life that there was something peculiar in their expression. It was quite sufficient to frighten a man of Carvalho's nervous temperament. He rose from the office chair and put the keys in his pocket.

"Good morning, Suriya. I am not quite ready yet. Sit down a minute; I shall be at liberty directly." He turned to Carvalho and spoke as though he were picking up the thread of a conversation. "I'll attend to all you say, Carvalho, and see that your heavy luggage is sent off by cart to Madura."

The two men walked out through the verandah and down the steps into the compound, leaving Suriya standing in the office.

"What makes you think Suriya would interest himself in these matters? He is not a devil worshipper."

"The villagers may have asked for his help, and promised to make it worth his while."

The other laughed. "A mahunt is not in the least likely to assist in a blood sacrifice of any kind. You do the man an injustice."

Basildon stopped and held out his hand in farewell. His companion glanced back at the bungalow. In the doorway stood the mahunt gazing out apparently at nothing in particular. Carvalho shivered slightly and cursed him under his breath. They were at too great a distance to be overheard, and the words he spoke were scarcely audible even to his companion. As if in response to the anathema the native smiled, showing his white teeth between lips that were cruelly thin. The eyes that had been fixed upon nothing were suddenly focussed on Carvalho.

"I am sure that man has the evil eye," he said uneasily. "Good-bye, I'm off at once to the station."

"You've plenty of time; no need to hurry, even if you walk it," said Basildon, who was standing with his back to the bungalow and had not noticed the second appearance of Suriya.

"I want to get out of this devil-ridden place. I'm sick of it," said the other, with a nervous irritation which made Basildon say—

"Take a few days' leave. You are run down by the

spell of hot weather and you want a rest. Good-bye; whatever you do, don't repeat those lying tales about the war."

He swung round to return to the office and smiled as his eye fell on the figure of the mahunt. He understood why Carvalho had hurried off so abruptly and was amused at his fears. Suriya came out of the bungalow to meet him frankly enough; and as Basildon joined him, all thought of treachery and sedition vanished. They set off at once on a quest which took them along the top of the high bank of the river, and they passed between the river and the camp.

It was early in the afternoon, too early for Margery to be out. Basildon's eyes lingered on the tents as he walked. He knew it was folly on his part to give the American girl a second thought; but he was unable to command those thoughts as long as the tents were in view, or to concentrate his mind on what the mahunt was saying. Suriya watched him furtively. They reached the end of the grove in which Enville had encamped, and the native stopped.

"Look at the river, sir; it is like silver," he said abruptly, with a subtle authority in his voice.

The band of ribbon meandering over the broad flat bed shone in the early afternoon sun with a dazzling brightness that arrested Basildon's attention and broke his line of thought; drawing the attention suddenly to a point of light is a common device with the adept in the art of hypnotism. The image of Margery faded from his mind; and as he let his eyes rest on the sparkling water, he was conscious of a tropical lethargy that created a desire for a pipe of tobacco and an arm-chair. The eyes of the mahunt dwelt upon him with curious intensity of purpose. Then resuming their walk they moved along slowly till they came to a solitary tree standing not far from the river bank. It was in full view of the river and the temple. On the distant horizon in the west the line of hills could be seen standing out in a clean, clear blue against the warm sun-steeped sky.

"I think this will suit our purpose," said Suriya.

"Admirably," acquiesced the Englishman. Somehow he was in a humour to agree with any statement his companion might choose to make.

"It would be advisable to see the sadhu, sir. He is probably at the river temple. Shall we walk down and find him?"

The words were gently spoken, and the voice sounded like the lapping of waves. They followed the path that Sunnee had taken in the early morning. Instead of fording the shallows, as the child had done, they passed over by the stepping-stones and reached the island on which the temple stood. The bed of rock that formed the island continued beyond the bridge, and served as the foundation for the unfinished pier.

"Mr. Carvalho is not in good health; he had fever in the hot weather. He was exposed to the sun in his work of superintending the workmen. I think he must have lived in the Bombay Presidency at some time of his life."

"Why do you say so?"

"He understands and speaks the language of the Bombay coolies. I often saw him with a crowd round him talking to them."

"He was giving them instructions about their work."

"I couldn't say, sir. He might have been talking to them about the removal of the tree. Whatever it was, it left them full of excitement."

A conviction forced itself into Basildon's mind that the subject might have been something else. Was it possible that Carvalho was a paid agent of the enemy, disseminating the infamous stories that he had repeated to Basildon? He knew that Carvalho needed money badly, and was pressed by his creditors. The suspicion hung in his mind as they walked along, and increased in force rather than diminished.

They found the old poojaree seated on the top of the temple steps with his back to the hideous image of the river god. His long hair hung down below his shoulders; and his face was gray with sacred ashes that had been ceremonially rubbed upon it. From beneath heavy brows his small black eyes shone with

alert watchfulness. He rose to his feet at the appearance of the Englishman.

"Salaam, sir!" he said as Basildon stopped before him.

"Salaam, servant of the gods. It is good for my eyes to see you again," Basildon spoke after the fashion of the country.

"And for my ears to hear your honour's voice; but you have come too soon. There was work to do, and we thought to get it over quickly."

"My ship arrived a day earlier than was expected. I left the port at once and the train was punctual."

"Thus do the gods work against men."

"Not so in this case, wise one. I have heard of the trouble in the village; and I am going to clear away the dark clouds that hang over the people."

"Your honour can do many things not always in the power of the European, but this has gone too far." He paused, and, fixing his gaze on Basildon, asked: "Is your Excellency aware of what has happened?"

"I have been told by Overseer Carvalho."

"Not all! not all! It is very bad. The Assistant Engineer has laughed at the amma! He has decreed that she is to be driven forth like an outcast, and her chosen abode is to be destroyed!"

"Believe me, wise one, it shall not be so!" cried Basildon.

The sadhu glanced sharply at him from under his bushy brows. Folding his sheet around him, and tossing back the rags and streamers and long hair over his shoulders, he reseated himself on the top step. The image seemed to grin with a fiendish satisfaction over the old man's head.

"Who dares to say 'shall not' to the Government's 'shall'?" he asked.

"I do," replied Basildon, decisively. "The matter of the tree has come into my hands. I say that the amma's rights shall be respected, as are the rights of the headman of the village, and the rest of the people."

The sadhu gave a grunt of satisfaction mingled with surprise; and there was a question in the black eyes, as they rested on the tall upright figure.

"This is a great matter, and it has gone too far. Already measurements have been marked round the tree where the workmen's tools will break the ground; and the amma has shown her displeasure."

"How, wise one?"

"Cattle belonging to the villagers have been found in their byres in the morning nearly dead with much travel. The amma and her husband have ridden them all night. Vasuva's wife has fallen ill of a fever. His house is close to the tree. The amma has drawn the health from the woman's body; and later on she will draw her life from her mouth."

"I tell you, father, these things must stop. By my order the evils must end, or I will let the Government do its worst. This very day at sunset, after work is done, I will talk with the headman and we will arrange this business to the amma's satisfaction. Meet me this evening under the big tree in the village and hear what I have to say."

Basildon's lethargy was passing. As he talked his energy returned with a sense of the lifting of a cloud from his mind. The sadhu grunted his assent, and Basildon left him seated there, a remnant of the worship of an extinct barbaric race that once held sway throughout the peninsular. The idol, perhaps a thousand years old, was fashioned by the Dravidian hands of the ancestors of the sadhu. Its forbidding features were evolved from the mind and brain of the animist; in his dread of unseen powers he sought to propitiate them with blood.

The brilliant sun lighted up temple and image and poojaree. They left a vivid picture on the mind of the Englishman as he walked away. A vague pity for the ignorance of the people who worshipped there filled him. They were at the mercy of men like the sadhu. The past still held them in its grip. Would they ever shake off the pall of superstition that deprived them of all faith in a benevolent and higher power?

The expression on the face of the mahunt as he followed Basildon was very different. It was one of contempt, tempered by no quality of pity. It was the racial contempt of the conqueror for the conquered which long

generations had failed to live down. He was equally ready to make use of the devil worshipper, or to spurn him as it suited his own purpose. Just now he thought he might possibly have a use for him.

Suriya left Basildon at the stepping-stones and the latter took the path that led to the grove. It was not the nearest way to the bungalow, but there was more shade, so Basildon told himself.

The afternoon was early. Mrs. Enville was lying down and Daffie slept by her side. Enville dozed in the long-armed chair and Warradaile was day-dreaming lazily in a cane lounge. The servants followed their masters' and mistresses' example and the camp was plunged into an atmosphere of drowsiness.

Basildon passed behind the tents; and as he walked over the seared grass he was seized with a sudden compunction. For the sake of his own peace of mind he would be wise to keep away from the camp. He quickened his pace and drew a breath of relief as he approached the edge of the tope where the trees joined the road. He passed the last ragged dusty trunk and came unexpectedly upon Margery. She was dressed in white, and wore a white sun-topee.

"Well met, Mr. Basildon!" she exclaimed in a tone of unmistakable pleasure that sent the blood racing through his veins. "I was just pining for a chat with some one. They are all asleep in the camp—dogs, pony, and servants as well."

"It is a custom of the country," he said as he took the outstretched hand without any of the morning's hesitation.

"One that you don't follow apparently."

"Nor you; I remember on board ship you were never caught napping in your chair, even on the hottest days in the Red Sea."

He was not aware of how much he betrayed in saying this.

"No; in California the afternoon is my busiest time. The works are humming and steaming, and I am pulling the strings of the business with my clerks and telephone and cables and mails. It's funny to see folks going to



bed just at the very busiest hour of the day. I should like to show you California."

"And I should like to see America."

He turned as if to go on his way, but she stopped him with characteristic decision.

"Now you need not go running off as if you thought you weren't wanted right here this very minute. As no business is on hand just now, you can make it your business to chat with me. What have you been doing this morning?"

"Taking over charge of my particular work."

"Let's walk over there, behind the tents, where I can look at the river. Do you know, I like that river. It's grand; it's like a sleeping giant. I want to see it get busy with its floods. Just now it is following the example of the rest of the world and is dead asleep."

He strolled by her side well content to let her chatter. He knew it was unwise; but the temptation was too great. There was not another soul to whom he could talk as he could talk to her. A vague sense of gratitude filled him as he listened to her fanciful description of the river. It was not what she said; it was her manner that charmed and pleased. Red tape and officialism vanished. He was a white man; she was a white woman. Their homes were in different hemispheres; but somehow she extended a hand of friendship towards him that no one in her position had ever offered before.

The time slipped by without either of them counting the minutes. The shadows grew longer as the sun stood over the western line of hills. Between them and the river bank a figure moved slowly towards the village. It was the mahunt. The grove was open to the public although the Assistant Engineer had pitched his camp there.

Suriya passed them at a little distance, walking slowly. He did not stop but raised his hand in salutation to his forehead and Basildon returned his greeting. His eyes rested on Margery. Hers were lifted to his with the keen critical gaze of the American who measures all humanity by his own standard. It was as though the two crossed swords in that look. Suriya remembered

where he had seen her. It was the evening before at the travellers' bungalow, when she had taken him for a pariah servant and had addressed him with the intention of giving him an order. It was an insult in his opinion that was not to be forgotten; and as he went his way, his back towards the couple, his brow contracted with an ugly frown.

"I don't like the look of that man," remarked Margery. "He's a grafter unless I'm very much mistaken."

"A grafter?"

"Yes; one who will—who might be up to mischief. He was the man I saw last evening. I didn't take to him then. I take less to him on a second interview."

Basildon laughed and asked what it was she did not like about him.

"It's his eyes."

Again he laughed and told her of Carvalho's prejudice against him. She listened with interest.

"Mr. Carvalho is right. You Englishmen are all so confiding and trustful. You don't understand what graft is."

The tea-bell rang outside the big tent.

"I must go. Good-bye, Mr. Basildon. Next time we meet don't bolt as you did this morning. After all our adventures together I think we may claim to be friends."

He did not reply. As he walked away in the direction of his little bungalow he was assailed with a wild desire to escape, to get a transfer and remove himself from an intangible danger that seemed to threaten him with disaster; but men in the service of the Government of India are not free agents, whether in superior or subordinate positions. They are anchored down by red tape and it takes time to obtain release.

## CHAPTER IX

A STRIKING feature of an Indian village is the tree that usually stands in the centre of it, and plays the part of town hall and market-place combined. Here the people assemble after work is done to discuss their affairs, to listen to the recitations of the village poet and to hear the news brought by the passing stranger. The poet recites his own effusions, wherein are local touches that elicit applause or laughter. He does not spare any one who has offended him, for the law of libel has not yet reached the Indian village. His praise or his silence are purchasable.

The chance traveller stops under the big tree to rest. In exchange for his stories of the doings in the great cities he receives food. He takes care that his tales shall be sensational. He sleeps in the open air under the shelter of a mud wall or the trunk of the old tree, and starts off at his own time the following day on his leisurely wanderings.

Under the tree that stood in Sirraloor a low platform was built. It served as a seat for the dignitaries of the village when they assembled in conclave. Punctually at six in the evening Basildon appeared according to his promise to solve the difficulty of the devil tree. A chair had been brought from the headman's house for his use. That official was not in the habit of using European furniture, but he had acquired a plain wooden chair, rickety and aged, to support his dignity as head of the village community. He was accustomed to seat himself in it, drawing up his legs beneath him, tailor fashion, when he received official visitors. The people understood that it was more for honour and glory than for

comfort, and that it was but fitting the Englishman should make use of it on this occasion.

Basildon took the chair with the air of a Lord Chief Justice and glanced round at the assembly. It was composed of men. Their heads were bare, and their garments were bound tightly round their waists. The bamboo sticks or lathees were in evidence. He signed to the company to seat themselves, which they readily did. It indicated that the palaver would not be hurried through. The native of India is never happier than when he sees the prospect of a long talk. Only the headman and the sadhu remained standing.

"Listen, wise one, servant of the river god and of his wife, the amma of the tree!"

The sadhu grunted in indication that his ears were open.

"Listen, headman and honourable men of the village!"

A chorus of similar grunts told him that he had their full attention. After a slow, deliberate preamble he said—

"I have taken over charge from Overseer Carvalho. I have talked with his Excellency, the Assistant Engineer. He has consented to let me do as I wish about the amma's tree."

"Good! Now we shall have justice," said the headman, speaking on behalf of the people.

"When the owner of a house wishes, for reasons of his own, to get rid of a tenant and take possession of the house, does he pull it down about the tenant's ears and turn him out into the road? No! If he did such a thing the law would protect the tenant and punish the owner."

There was a chorus of approval from the company led by the sadhu.

"What is the proper course as laid down by the law?" continued Basildon. "We all know it. Notice shall be duly served on the tenant, stating that the house will be required by the landlord at the end of a certain time for his own use. The tenant then has an opportunity of seeking a fresh residence and making arrangements for the housing of his family and personal property."

# THE BY A INDIAN R

"His honour is right" It is so! And  
 cried the headman with some excitement  
 emotion had subsided Basildon were  
 upon

"The amma must be treated in the  
 I will serve her with a fortnight's notice  
 promise payment of two weeks' rent in  
 all sorts of the notice. The form shall  
 in the tree so that there can be no mistake

"Good!" exclaimed the headman again  
 voice prevented further speech for the moment  
 it had subsided he asked a question  
 people wish to know where the amma  
 when she leaves the tree?"

"I have not forgotten to make even  
 of her comfort and pleasure. The wise  
 chosen a new and a better tree for her abode  
 by the river beyond the tope and from it  
 temple of the river god"

"Ah, ha!" chorused the crowd as they  
 all

"Forty-two days from now there shall  
 in the village. With taintoms and baj  
 their stone shall be moved in procession and  
 A big sacrifice of blood shall be made.  
 give a buffalo, and the amma shall have  
 none of you have ever seen before. The  
 devil-dance and fireworks. Thus the  
 danger fear her a great. Cattle will thrive  
 a full and heavy harvest, the rains will  
 there will be no sickness in these parts."

He ceased, and the murmur of approval  
 so far all had gone well and he had carried  
 vote with him. He would gladly have  
 puncture, but there was still more to be done.  
 be entrusted to no one else but himself  
 out a paper from his pocket. It was an official  
 prepared in due order, such as would  
 tenant householders who a settlement was  
 with him. Then

he handed it to the headman

put in an excellent piece of hominence, speaking in a loud, sonorous, and in a strong voice. The people, however, did not breathe, and listened in silence. They were faint with thirst and it presented no difficulty to them to comprehend. When it was finished and the hominence had signified the approval of the assembly, he said—

“We will go to the tree and give the notice.”

The official document was given back to him and he stood on the platform. Then with tomtoms and hired dancers came forward at the bidding of the headman. The sullen took up his position immediately behind the tomtom. Basilton followed the ascetic and the headman behind him the rear in single file. After them came the crowd, pushing each other but not presuming to step upon the three principal figures in the procession. Then but a few feet behind little clouds of dust that thickened in the twilight. To the west the orange of the sunset shone glowingly, turning the landscape into rich madder brown and dark green.

The procession moved slowly along the village street in the direction of the devil tree. Women peeped from behind bamboo screens set up in front of their doors; and children silent with fear and awe, clung to their mothers' skirts. Small boys, more daring, than their sisters, ventured to throw stones at the rear.

As the procession approached the edge of the grove where the village camp was pitched, Warradale arose behind him and followed. By his side sat Marjory, Josephine, and he occupied the seat behind. Following them came Basilton with his cat and the two native children. Warradale pulled up to allow the procession to pass.

“Why, there’s Mr Basilton!” said Marjory, in some surprise. “What can he be doing?”

“Taking part in some heathen function, apparently,” said Warradale with an upsticking of the eye-brow.

Is it not for Englishmen to join in heathen ceremonies?

“Not if the ceremony is religious. This may be a religion.”

Josie leaned forward to suggest an explanation.

"Probably the procession is connected with the devil tree. They are going to do poojah to the amma before cutting down her tree."

"Oh! do let me go and help, mummie," cried the excited Daffie, as she stuck a long bare leg over the door of the motor-car in her eagerness to get out. To join in a procession and assist at one of those mysterious sacrifices where cocks and goats were killed was a wild and secret aspiration that she had never had an opportunity of fulfilling. Josie pulled her back, rearranging legs and garments with due regard to decency, and the car moved slowly into the road. It turned away from the receding crowd.

Margery glanced after the figures. That of Basildon stood out conspicuously. She could distinguish his white sun helmet and broad shoulders as he marched by himself in his appointed place. He had given no sign of recognition as he passed. His face wore the same expression of determination and set purpose as when he stepped off the platform under the big tree and took his place behind the sadhu.

As to what Miss Longford might think of him he did not permit himself to speculate. A duty had to be done, and he intended to do it. His object was to prevent a riot in which the lives of the Europeans might be endangered. He had adopted the course which seemed best, and he meant to see it through. At the same time he was conscious of a wave of annoyance. It was a bit of bad luck that he should be caught in such a strange position. If it had been only Mrs. Enville he would not have minded; it could have been explained; but with Margery and Mr. Warradaile it was different. To them no explanation, no excuse for his being found in such an undignified position, could be given. They must think what they would.

He had purposely fixed the hour at sunset, as being one that would most probably see them abroad, walking or driving away from the village. Under ordinary circumstances it would have been so; but to-day, as it happened, Warradaile had been delayed by the visit of

a native official whose business could not be put off. Envile was also detained ; and Margery and Josie were obliged to exercise their patience and wait till the two men could get away.

Warradaile intended returning to Madura in the cool of the evening by moonlight, and he had suggested that the Envilles and Margery should drive part of the way with him. The road was level and good, and a twenty-mile run through the night air would be pleasant.

When the car was through the village and the way clear of dogs, fowls, pigs, and children, Warradaile was able to give his attention to his two companions. He leaned back and addressed Mrs. Envile.

"Does your husband consider it ~~possible to allow his~~ subordinates to assist at these village festivals?" he asked.

"I really can't say. I don't think it has ever occurred before ; the necessity, I mean. This is a special case, as you know. He has placed the trouble of the devil tree unreservedly in Overseer Basildon's hands, and left him to act as he considers best."

"I should have thought the man could have adjusted the business without—I hardly know how to put it—without identifying himself too closely with that old vagabond of an ascetic."

Josie had the *esprit de corps* of her husband's department, and did not quite approve of the criticism of one of his subordinates, although the criticism was mild.

"The Overseer has a difficult, not to say delicate, task in carrying out the order to cut the tree down without creating trouble," she said.

"He has graft to deal with ; you may bet your bottom dollar on that fact," said Margery, before Warradaile could reply. "And I reckon that you couldn't have a better man to figure it out than Mr. Basildon. He has a thorough knowledge of the native. That I could see with half an eye when we were crossing from Colombo. The way he handled the crowd of savages—as I took them to be—that wanted to devour me and my luggage, was great. It showed that he had got a grip of the native character, and was making no mistakes."



"Did he befriend you on the road?" asked Warradaile, with a touch of curiosity.

"Indeed he did!" She gave a graphic account of her adventures, including the drive to the camp in his cart. "The strange part of it was that on board ship I didn't much like him. I thought he was too stand-offish; but I've changed my opinion since then—some."

"I wish I had been at the station with my car," he said. "You should have wired to me, Mrs. Envile."

"How could I do so from camp?"

"Ah! true; I forgot. Of course you could not."

The moon rose, and the flaming west died down into sober tones. They ran swiftly past a landscape marked by the same features she had noted in a more leisurely way the evening before. Was it only twenty-four hours since she was sitting, in the country-made bamboo cart, by the side of a man who had vanished suddenly from her plane, although not from her sight? It was strange, and the American woman found it difficult to grasp the position.

Warradaile, however, proved a pleasant companion. The drive was refreshing after the hot day, and altogether enjoyable. They reached the spot where Envile had decided to turn back, and Margery gave a little sigh of regret that was not lost on Warradaile. They waited for Envile to come up. He had put a sufficient distance between them and himself to avoid the dust raised by their wheels.

"You say you have another twenty miles to go," said Margery. "I envy you the drive; it is such a glorious evening."

"Most evenings in India are what you call glorious when we have a moon like this," replied Warradaile. "We must arrange for some more drives."

He began to make plans for another meeting before long, and gave them a pressing invitation to pay him a visit; but they must stay the night and not think of running away the same day, an invitation Josie readily accepted.

Meanwhile Basildon pursued his way without deviating from his purpose. He walked in solemn procession,

the beat of the tom-toms in his ears, and the smoke of the flaring torches in his nostrils. On arrival at the tree the old sadhu produced some butter and camphor, and a number of balls of rice stained red with the blood of the sacrifice that had been killed in preparation.

The people ranged themselves round the tree in a wide semi-circle standing two or three deep while the old man chanted his poojah. Now and then he paused, and the people uttered a strange, tremulous cry, weird and melancholy. The tone was produced by placing the hand in front of the open mouth and rapidly touching the lips with the palm. Children in England make the same noise for no other reason but amusement. The devil-worshipper has a very urgent reason for his action. He believes that the evil spirit will enter his body by the mouth, if he ventures within a certain distance of the demon's haunt between sunset and sunrise. He therefore covers his mouth with his hand and only removes it by a rapid motion sufficient to allow the sound of his cry to come forth. The movement gives the long tremolo note, said to be acceptable to the devil's ear.

When the poojah was ended Basildon approached the devil-stone. He drew forth the blue official paper containing the notice and read it out, asking the amma to take notice that the tree was required by Government, and she must quit it in the stated time. He then nailed the document to the trunk of the tree above the stone.

The light in the west disappeared, and night enveloped the landscape. The coppersmith bird and the koels had gone to roost. Only the occasional wail of a waterbird flying over the river came from the distance. Large moths fluttered down from the foliage and scorched their wings in the fire of the torches. Prowling among the pampas grass on the river banks the jackals raised a melancholy howl.

The sadhu stepped forward into the lurid light of the flaring oil and took up a position before the tree. He called on the amma by name; and from the green foliage seemed to come a sound that was half a shriek, half a groan. The people, with the exception of Basildon, fell

on their faces, their hands were extended in supplication, and they touched the ground with their foreheads.

The Englishman stood solemn and rigid, conscious of the folly of the people and chicanery of the sadhu. His thoughts flew back to London where he had seen a ventriloquist manipulating his automatic doll with the moveable lower jaw. What a fortune the man could have made in India with his puppet!

In a loud voice the sadhu called upon the amma to observe the formal notice pinned to the tree. He promised in the name of the headman and the villagers a better tree nearer to the river, and a blood sacrifice ~~with~~ <sup>with</sup> many balls of rice. The rice should be thrown into the river; then the waters would be loosened which should bring her spouse, and the floods would come down, carrying blessings and fertility and abundant crops.

He ceased speaking, and again there was a strange sound among the leaves. Once more heads were bowed, and a tremulous wail was raised by the worshippers.

"Your honour does not believe in the amma," said the sadhu in Basildon's ear.

"We are taught that there are devils, wise one, but they do not appear in person to Englishmen."

"Yet the amma is assuredly there, Excellency."

"She is made by the thoughts of the people."

The sadhu looked fixedly into Basildon's eyes. Laying his horny clawlike hand on his arm he pointed with the other to the crown of foliage above the stone. Basildon's eyes followed the direction of the finger. Was it fancy, or did he see peering out of the leaves an evil face? It was vague and indistinct in the flickering torch-light; but one characteristic stood out distinctly. The features wore an expression of hideous malignity and cunning; the eyes seemed to glitter with the red lights of the torches; and the general impression left on Basildon's mind by the fleeting vision was one of triumphant dominant wickedness and hate of mankind.

Startled in spite of himself, Basildon closed his eyes on the ugly sight, opening them a few seconds later. The vision in some marvellous manner had changed. It was no longer a devil that looked down upon him, but

the sweet face of Margery Longford, as he had seen it when she sat by his side during the drive. In another second the impression was gone; and, search as he would, the foliage of the tree had no more pictures, good or evil, to show him. The sadhu had removed his hand and was standing by his side with eyes cast down; the fire from them had departed.

"It is too late," the old man murmured, more to himself than to Basildon. "The power is gone from his honour for ever. He will never look into the hidden world of the gods again."

"Why, keeper of the amma's altar?" asked Basildon curiously.

"Because a woman has come in between. From henceforth she fills your vision."

"What if I cast her out?"

"That is beyond your power. She is stronger than you; she rules your destiny."

The cries of the worshippers died down, and the sadhu turned to the people.

"Depart home, my sons. All is well. The amma has received the notice. She will accept the sacrifice, and take pleasure in the new abode which we have chosen for her."

The crowd melted away, vanishing quickly into the dimness of the night. Basildon stood like a man in a dream. When he looked round he found he was alone with the amma; she was the weird fanciful creation of the imagination of the animist, he told himself. Then the strange words of the sadhu came back to his memory.

Was it indeed true that a woman had entered his life, and blinded his vision to all else in the world?

## CHAPTER X

MARGERY settled down very happily. The open-air life had a great charm for her. It was different from any home experience in its sights and sounds. The routine of the day with its hours of meals, its employments, even its recreations, contrasted strongly with those of her Western world. She could see no similarity in the vegetation, in humanity, nor in the birds, beasts and flowers. She had spoken nothing but the truth when she told Warradaile that there was no comparison between his country of adoption and hers ; there was only contrast.

The colour and manner of the Hindu servants differed from the coloured labour of California. An atmosphere of hoary antiquity hung round the Hindu, marking him as a prehistoric survival. The lower classes of her own home were essentially modern, being mostly of mixed blood, the yellow man as well as the negro having mingled his blood with the Spaniard and the white European from further north. In later generations the North and South American had come in to work further confusion. They had no tradition of conservatism, no ancient faith, no long inherited customs. Even the heat was different in effect as well as in sensation. On the Indian plains it was more enervating and productive of lassitude. Certainly they were nearer the equator at Sirraloor than San Francisco, but the sun felt no hotter.

She had never before lived under canvas. Tent life was a new experience. It partook of the nature of a well-organized, thoroughly equipped picnic. In place of the tiled verandah a roof of interlaced branches with dark green foliage threw a chequered shade over the tent:

and screened them from the fierce rays of the tropical sun. Instead of the busy streets thronged with various nationalities, every man wide awake to the main chance in life, there was the village road innocent of tram and rattling carts. The men and women who passed along the road walked bare-footed and without haste or hustle. They were pure-blooded Hindus, wedded to the customs of their ancestors of a hundred generations.

The greatest attraction of all was the river with its broad bed of sand and its sleepy thread of water, the only sign of its vitality. Every day at some time or another she found an opportunity of going to its bank to look across or up and down. Sometimes she crept there after dark when the heat and the drought of the day had gone and the night was cool with a soft refreshing breeze. Under the magical touch of darkness space lost its boundaries and the river bed seemed limitless. At that hour she could no longer follow the windings of the stream, white and silvery in the morning and blue in the afternoon. Each time she gazed upon its breadth and width she wondered afresh if the skies could ever pour down sufficient water to broaden it so that last the piers of that long bridge might be wetted. Could those banks patched with pampas grass, babul thorn, cactus and palmyra ever feel the water lapping at their base with a stretch from shore to shore in one unbroken sweep? Impossible!

Sometimes Josie accompanied her; but if drawn in another direction by her imperative daughter, Margery had for her companion Sunnec. He followed or preceded her in an unattached, independent manner peculiar to his own quaint personality. Here, too, Basildon occasionally ventured, sure of a welcome and half an hour's chat. Each time he left her he called himself a fool for his pains. The nearer she unconsciously drew him to her the deeper seemed the gulf that lay between them; the more impassable did it appear when he thought of what the future might have held for him and for her had they met under different circumstances.

In her mind the future had no definite outline. She looked upon him as a friend, something --

than an acquaintance ; but that he had stepped into her life as a factor to be dealt with at some time or other she had no conception. The knowledge might come at any time. For the present it was hidden from her.

Josie watched her meetings with Basil don at first with apprehension. Her fears were soon allayed, however. Margery, apparently heart-whole, fell easily into the wiles of the match-maker and allowed herself to be increasingly interested in Warradaile, who contrived to see something of them every day. If he did not come in his own motor, he ran over by rail and they went to meet him at the station, sending him back the same way. Whether he arrived by rail or motor, it was after the morning walk, and it so happened that he never saw Basil don in Margery's company.

Each hour had its own incidents and the day passed with an unhurried regularity that was new to her. It was restful in its novelty and in the absence of all mental strain. The lethargy of the East crept over her with an irresistible fascination. She gave way to it and had no regret for idle hours that grew into wasted days.

Every morning at dawn her little visitor appeared. Sometimes she was not awake when he arrived and touched the puidah with a gentle hand. His round eyes peered through the mosquito net, and seeing the beautiful lady asleep, he crept away to the edge of the tent. There he seated himself to watch and wait for the opening of the wonderful eyes that were like his own skies. No one in his world of dark complexions had such eyes ; they were the eyes of a goddess.

At the first stirring of the great queen the child rose. Approaching the edge of the mat that lay by the side of the bed, he fell on his knees, folded his hands and began to repeat his morning prayer. No amount of direction, given by Margery to his mother, nor to the little person himself, could persuade him into any other course. If removed forcibly he returned to the charge at the first opportunity, picked up his orisons where they had been broken off, and continued them to the end, his knees bent and his hands folded.

Margery gave in at last to the inevitable. She smothered her qualms of conscience and consented tacitly, since she could not help herself, to act as a kind of deputy for the child's Destiny; and she made no attempt to interrupt him when once he had fairly started his devotions.

Prayers concluded, Sunnee allowed himself to take an interest in her morning tea. A slice of bread and jam was specially provided, the jam being spread on both sides by her express order.

They were happy moments, but they were not without the proverbial thorn that goes with each rose. On one point she and her little visitor could not agree. It was a matter of dress. Out of a bit of flaming turkey-red she made him a pair of drawers that met the short jacket at the waist and completed the suit.

He was put into them for the first time in her presence and he submitted without a word. Two or three times the full pretty lips curved in grief, and the bright black eyes filled with tears. He looked down at the unusual garments and up into her face with an unspoken reproach, as a dog might regard a master who was making fun of him by dressing him up; but never a word of protest came from the child. He bore his burden of trouble nobly and escaped at the very first opportunity. Later in the morning, when she issued from her tent dressed for her walk, Sunnee presented himself all smiles and happiness with the "matutinal egg of the faithful fowl" in his right hand, his left raised to his forehead in salaam. The reason for his restored happiness was not found in the gift but in the absence of the new garment. It was gone. The girdle of sting with its silver pendants, the little short coat and the jingling anklets comprised his entire dress.

It was explained to Mary that her son must learn to wear the dual garment. Mary communicated the instructions to her mother, who shook her head.

"Not proper to make native child same like European child," commented the conservative old woman with disapproval. "That new missie taking too much trouble. Bad luck coming that way. Must



let the little budinash alone and take no notice ourselves."

Accordingly Sunnee was deliberately neglected, occasionally slapped and generally abused. It was all well meant, and done in his interests. Systematic neglect would nullify injudicious attention and strike an average; and he would be saved from the misfortunes which too much petting might bring upon him.

The next morning Sunnee rose from the mat on which he slept by the side of his parents and went out into the cool air of the dawn. He followed his father to the spot where the water-pot stood and performed his ablutions in close imitation of the poon, pouring water over his hands and feet, and bathing his face. The jacket was put on by thrusting his arms into it above his head, as he had seen his father don his short coat. Sunnee watched the process of winding and adjusting the turban with a sad little face. He had no turban; and his cap was put away for gala occasions in his grandmother's box. Of all things he desired a turban.

His father presently departed to the office bungalow, and the child crept to the tent. Margery was awake. She lifted the mosquito curtain as the little figure pushed aside the purdah and entered. His face had lost its sadness, and wore an unusual expression of triumph. The garment Margery had been at the trouble of making for him was twisted round his head in the shape of a turban as near as he could get it. One leg was dragged over his closely-shaven head like a cap, and the other was bound round and tucked in with the inherited skill of the true oriental.

Margery had not the heart to upset an arrangement that afforded so much pleasure. She made up her mind to bear with his nakedness; and when he fell on his knees to say his prayers, she turned away her eyes lest the sight of the misplaced pyjamas should send her into laughter that would have been out of tune with the child's orisons.

Later in the day a rummage in her trunk produced

a remnant of coloured muslin, which, with Mary's help, was twisted into a turban, and the drawers were once more set at liberty for their legitimate use. Mary was instructed to see that her son was properly dressed the next morning, and the order was passed on to Sunnee with threats and admonitions, all of which he received in solemn silence.

Her duties to her mistress gave her little time to attend to her own offspring. She made a laudable effort, however, to carry out Margery's wishes, and begged Nellappa the next morning to complete the child's toilet before he went off to the bungalow. Accordingly Sunnee's unwilling legs were thrust into the article of attire that he hated, and dewy eyelashes marked his abhorrence. Pleasure in the new turban brought back a smile, and compensated for the misery of having to wear trousers; and the tears were soon dried. The boy drank the coffee prepared by his wife, and hurried away to his duties at the office.

Ten minutes later Sunnee crept quietly into Margery's tent and waited the signal of her opening eyes to say his prayers. She gazed at him as he began his repetition. The new turban was worn with an unmistakable swagger; but the pyjama had been removed from his legs, and were tied round his waist as a cummerbund.

After this Margery acknowledged herself beaten in her endeavour to defeat and alter old-established customs. Sunnee wore his clothes as he chose. He was seldom without the pyjamas, but they were never in the right place fulfilling their legitimate purpose. The string and silver ornaments remained stationary: the jacket was sometimes to the fore, sometimes absent: the muslin served as a turban, as a waistband, as a shawl, and occasionally as a mat to sit upon, according to the wearer's fancy.

"India is very conservative," remarked Warradaille one day to Margery as they drove swiftly through the evening air. He had been telling of his experiences and of the work he had to do for the Government.

"That's so!" she acquiesced. "It is part and parcel

of the Hindu ; it is as ingrained as his colour." was thinking of her futile attempt to breech Sunn

"You have not been long in learning a fundam fact that confronts us at every turn ; there is no g away from India's conservatism. I wonder how arrived at it."

"Observation perhaps. I am an employer of myself, coloured labour, but of a different cha from the Hindu. I allow I'm interested in your man."

"Your servants are negroes, I suppose."

"I was not thinking of my house servants. the canning business in my mind. You know, of c that I am a fruit canner."

"I understood that you had an interest in business. Mrs. Enville did not tell me what it Your father probably manages it——" He hesit business and trade were distasteful to the mar belonged to the governing class, but he took not to show any sign of his leaning one way c other.

"My father is dead, and I have no brother sisters. I was an only child. Some time bef died, he took me as a partner into the busines taught me how to run it. He didn't have me a for play ; it was sheer hard work. Since his de have managed it by myself."

He looked at her as if he did not quite gras full meaning of her words.

"You have a manager, I suppose."

"Of course I have. Every department h manager ; but I'm boss, and they know it. I everything myself, and put on no frills over it. I believe in leaving a working business of that k paid hands. If ever the time comes that I can sonally supervise it, I shall chuck it ; sell out, into a limited liability company."

"Do you like the work ?" he asked, not quit in his mind that it was the kind of thing a should be engaged in unassisted.

"Rather !" she replied enthusiastically. "You

I have come out to India for pleasure, perhaps. You make a mistake. I'm here, in the first place, on business, and in the second, for pleasure. In another fortnight or three weeks, when I've had my bit of rest, I'm going down to Madras to see if I can't establish connections with the principal Europe stores in that city, which may lead to a big turnover. I've got a list of the names of the firms. Before I left California, I sent off sample cases of the goods supplied by the Longford Fruit Canning firm—that's my house—to Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta. I shall follow up those cases and show my own samples."

"Surely, Miss Longford, that sort of work could be better done by—by experienced commercial travellers."

"Not a bit of it! It's a stunt that no one can run so well as the boss himself. He jumps in with both feet and gets a gait on that no hired man will trouble to do."

Warradaile laughed in spite of himself. The fascination lay, not in the words she used, which were unfamiliar to his English ears, but in her manner of speaking. It was entirely free from any self-consciousness, and it was innocent of pose, the besetting weakness of modern times. Her very seriousness and determination had a charm for him. He pictured the interviews that were to take place between herself and the principals of the firms; their bewilderment at having to examine the samples before her; their embarrassment at being obliged perhaps to refuse to buy. Then came the thought that she could give it all up at any moment and clear out of her fruit-canning business, which he was inclined to regard rather as a plaything than a serious occupation. She would probably realize a considerable fortune whenever she chose to relinquish it.

"If it amuses you," he found himself saying, "I suppose there is no objection to it; but I must say that I think—I think"—he was going to hint that he considered it unsuitable employment for a lady, when it struck him that such a sentiment might savour of snobishness; he concluded rather lamely—"that it is not, it cannot be congenial work."

"That's where you make a mistake," she rejoined warmly. "Don't you understand that trade is my particular pitch, as we say in California, and it keeps me hustling day and night to get my reach just as long or a little longer than my neighbour? There's nothing so satisfactory in this world as a good bargain, whether you're buying yards of calico or selling tons of canned peaches. I love it!"

"Do you? Well, let us have a bargain now—you and I. I want you to come over and see my house and garden at Madura. I'm a great gardener, you know; and I should like to show you my ferns and lilies. There's nothing in Madura like them."

"I shall be delighted; but it seems to me that it isn't a bargain, since I alone shall be the gainer. Where do you come in?"

"I shall have the pleasure of entertaining you and of 'bucking' about my flowers and plants."

"Then it's a deal," she said. "And it's up to you to fix it with Mrs. Enville as soon as you like."

The visit was easily arranged, and was not the only one that was paid. On one excuse or another, an inspection of the big temple, of Tirumal Naick's palace, a call at the club and on other friends for golf or tennis, Warra-laile persuaded them to come over. If they were disinclined to face the long motor drive, he found good reason for appearing at the camp; and he was never without a welcome.

## CHAPTER XI

ONE day Warradaile motored over to the camp bringing with him the Assistant Superintendent of Police. The visit, he took care to tell Mrs Enville, was prompted by pleasure and the chance idleness of the afternoon. He wished to show Southam the devil tree. The story of giving the amma a legal notice to quit had leaked out. It was a novel way of dealing with a mythical personage—a proceeding which might prove useful as a precedent; and the police officer was interested to see how it had been managed. Basildon met them at the tree by appointment and explained what he had done.

"You think that the villagers are satisfied," said Southam, looking at the notice nailed to the tree with a smile on his lips.

"I believed so, sir, until two days ago, when the headman came to me and complained in the name of the people that the amma was not likely to be appeased, even if she allowed herself and her stone to be removed. There are other signs of discontent, or rather I should call it disaffection, in the village."

"What are they?" asked Southam, quickly.

"It is difficult to define them. The men look troubled and anxious; and their manner when I speak to them is not what I like."

"What do you suspect?" Basildon did not reply immediately, and Southam continued, "You have your suspicions?"

"I have; but I can't give any good reason for them. I am convinced that some one is stirring up discontent and disloyalty. I wish I could lay my finger on the man."

"So do I!" responded the Superintendent of Police,

with sudden warmth. "And so I will in time. I wonder if you could help me?"

"I shall be glad to do all I can; but this is more a matter for the police than a D.P.W. Overseer, sir."

"That is so. Moreover, I quite see that it won't do for you to be looked upon, by-and-bye, as a spy among your workpeople and the villagers. Shall I send three or four constables up from Madura?"

"The presence of the police will put the mischief-maker on his guard and only irritate the people," remarked Basildon.

"What about a tracker, a detective?" asked Enville.

"The mere fact of a stranger coming among them might excite their suspicion," said Southam. He turned again to Basildon. "You might keep your ears open, and if you hear anything that gives a clue you could let me know."

Basildon shook his head. "I am not likely to hear anything more than I have already discovered, sir. I have spoken with the peons and the workpeople and also with the villagers."

"Do you suspect any resident in the village?"

"No; I can't think of any one likely to preach sedition deliberately."

"Have any strangers been through the place lately?"

"We are never long without men and women travelling up and down between this and Ceylon; but they are always quiet people who have very little to say, and they never stay long."

"What about that mahunt?" asked Enville. "He is often in the village. He seems on excellent terms with the people. I often see him talking to them."

"The mahunt could have no object in spreading disaffection and stirring up the place to revolt, sir. He comes here to look after some land belonging to his mutt. On the contrary, from what he has said at different times, I believe he does all in his power to restore confidence and preserve peace."

"When do you remove the stone?"

"To-morrow evening after sunset."

"Do you anticipate trouble at the time of removal?"

"No, sir; not during the tamashā. The people will be too much taken up with the feast; they will thoroughly enjoy the poojah. The trouble will come, if it is coming at all, as soon as we touch the tree with an axe."

Southam nodded his head in assent. "When do you begin?" he asked.

"The very next day. We have no time to lose. The clouds have gathered over the hills, and it needs no message to tell us that in another ten days or fortnight the rain will begin to fall heavily. It may be later, but we ought not to risk any unnecessary delay."

"Basildon is right in that respect, and the river may rise at any time," said Envile. "Let us hope that he is wrong in looking for rioting trouble. I don't see why the people should not settle down after the sacrifice and feast, and be contented."

"I am sure I wish it might be so," said Southam. "Unfortunately just now there is nothing doing in the fields, so that they are comparatively idle, and consequently ripe for mischief. I never have any trouble at seed time or harvest; but in between sometimes it is the very deuce. Usually it is caste riots or some religious difficulty like this."

"Well, let's hope for the best. We don't know for certain that there is going to be any rioting," said Envile.

"Unfortunately I have reasons for supposing otherwise," said Southam. "I heard yesterday that the kullais of Trichinopoly had sent off a truck load of loaded lathees. They were consigned to Sivaloor."

"That looks like business," said Envile, startled. "What have you done?"

"I saw the traffic manager last evening and arranged with him that the truck containing the staves should be shunted on to a siding and forgotten for a few days. By that time I hope we shall be through this business and all danger of a riot over."

"The lathees were meant to break our heads, I take it; not a pleasant thought!" remarked Envile, thinking of his wife and child and his guest.

"May I give you a word of advice, Envile? Send



Mrs. Enville, Daffie, and Miss Longford into a few days. This is not the place for them; there should be a riot." Southam turned again. "Is that old sadhu, who is to do pooj stone, at the bottom of this mischief?"

"I have no reason to suspect him, sir. lose rather than profit by it. Usually it is men who stir up trouble; the old have nothing from a riot but broken heads and a term of imprisonment. Their sons and grandsons swear them to save their own skins."

Enville was about to turn away when said—

"I think it would be as well, Enville, business that called you to headquarters days."

"Yes, sir," added Basildon, breaking in with eagerness. "The camp can remain as it is; peons to look after it; and you and Mrs. Longford could come back after the trouble."

"Seems rather as if I were running away from it?"

"Not at all!" replied Southam, decisively. "The wisest thing you can do. It might save trouble if you were absent. What do you think, Overseer?"

"That you are right, sir. It would be a relief to know that the camp was empty. Otherwise we ought to have extra police."

"And that might bring the whole affair to a head, which is exactly what we want to avoid."

Southam and Enville walked away leaving Southam to his own thoughts. They were not pleased. Some one was at work spreading discontent among the Government Basildon was not only were the villagers idle, but the village the bridge were also unemployed. He was coming across groups of them talking with the Overseer. They were often excited; but the moment the Overseer fell upon them and they were mute. When he was glad to see, had reappeared since the last time he had been served on the amma, and had taken up

occupations, but he was aware that they looked at him furtively as they passed; and that the happy smile with which they used to greet him was missing.

Basildon had not seen the mahunt for the last three or four days, he said as he remembered Carvalho's aversion to the mahunt. He had heard from Eurasians strange stories of men who had come under the influence of the evil eye; how they could not call their souls their own, and were completely dominated by the will of the mahunt possessing it.

From the mahunt his thoughts went to the sadhu. The old fanatic claimed to do more than control the wills of men. His power was extended to the control of evil, not to reform it but to use it to his own ends. Basildon remembered tales of individuals who had been drawn into intimate association with such men. They had voluntarily taken part in the poojah, performed in the hope of personally benefiting by it. He called to mind a Eurasian Police Inspector, who was said to have associated himself with a blood sacrifice to a demon supposed to guard treasure in a rock. Whether treasure was found or not no one could say; but the fact became known later that money had somehow found its way into his hands. For a man in his position he became comparatively rich. But he paid the penalty of his temerity. For ever afterwards it was said that his eyes were opened and he saw evil things, the existence of which he had never dreamed of before. When his gaze rested on his favourite daughter, a hideous face leered at him over her shoulder and drew his thoughts to the evil that was written on the shadowy features. When his son met him smiling and innocent the same countenance haunted the wretched man.

There was but one ending for those who accepted help from the powers of evil; they died by their own hands; and this was what happened to the Police Inspector. Basildon smiled at the credulity of the men and women who believed such tales.

"In this country there are many strange things hidden from man. On the other hand, many are revealed," said the voice of the mahunt at his elbow.

Basildon started and turned quickly. He had not heard him approach. Suriya could not possibly have known what was in his mind, yet his words fitted in with his thoughts in an uncanny manner.

"In this country man is a poor credulous creature if he is a Hindu," retorted Basildon, slightly nettled, he could not have told why.

"Say a Hindu of the lower orders," added Suriya. "I quite agree with you, sir. Only this morning I found a company of young men under the big tree listening to a passing traveller. They looked excited and I asked what he had been telling them."

"Who was he?" asked Basildon, avoiding the penetrating gaze of the mahunt. He was beginning to believe that Carvalho was not without good reason for his antipathy to those lingering, snaky eyes.

"A Bombay hawker, travelling down south to Ceylon with cotton goods. He and his two coolies took their midday meal under the shade of the tree. The idlers in the village—and there are plenty of them just now—came up and asked for news, as is the custom."

"What had he to say?"

"That giant flying ships, bigger than the largest steamer that comes into Bombay, had flown from Germany to England and had rained fire upon London. The great city is burned to the ground. The King's palace, the big churches, and all the Government offices with their valuable papers are destroyed. The papers are those by which men draw their pay and pensions. Pensions in India will be stopped, which will be very hard on the sepoy. There is only one remedy for the people of India."

"And what may that be?"

"German rule. Already, he assured us, there is a large German army at Brindisi, another at Marsilles, and a third at Aden. The great Kaiser has promised to continue the pensions of all native Government servants and sepoys who receive him as their ruler. He promises also to retain those natives in office who do not oppose him."

"What an infamous statement! I hope you

contradicted the story and assured the people that it was all false from beginning to end."

"Of course I did, sir; and the fellow had the impudence to ask which of us had been latest in Bombay! 'It is the latest woman from the well who brings the freshest water,' he added. Then to show me that he spoke nothing but the truth, he produced some photographs of London in flames. The church with a domed tower like a mosque was a blazing mass. The wharfs by the river, the bridges, the law courts, Buckingham Palace, all were sending up clouds of smoke and long tongues of fire. Over all flew the airships, still dropping bombs on parts that had not yet caught alight."

"False! All as false as the words!" cried Basildon, angrily.

"But they were photographs, sir. We all know that the sun pictures cannot lie."

"In the hands of unscrupulous men they do lie, I tell you. The photographs had the smoke and flames painted in by those cunning devils of Germans; and you Indians are fools enough to believe anything!"

"It is of no use to be angry, sir," replied the mahunt, in a more temperate tone than might have been expected. "I threatened him with the police, telling him that whether the tales were true or not, the teller of such stories was to be punished. He did not like that, I can assure you; and he took himself off in a hurry. He left the young men wide-eyed and wondering."

"I wish I had heard him!" said Basildon, his anger still burning.

As they talked they moved slowly away from the tree where Suriya had found the Overseer.

"The Assistant Engineer brought the Superintendent of Police with him. Mr. Southam came over to see the tree?" said the mahunt with a curiosity he could not hide.

"I believe so. He was interested in the manner of ejection."

"Here is a thing that would have interested them both. It is a crystal that was brought from the dead city of jewels in the jungles of Ceylon."

He produced a piece of quartz with its nature untouched.

"Take it in your hands, sir, and look at it; certain light it shows the ray that is seen in the eye stone. It is said that it has caught and kept its walls all that it has ever witnessed. Some men the gift of seeing the pictures; to others the reverse nothing. Perhaps you possess the gift."

He placed the crystal in Basildon's palm. It sent a strong shaft of light into its depth. So within him gave warning of an unknown danger was not afraid of mythical demons, but he had some fear of the practice of hypnotism, which it existed; and he summoned all his will power and any influence that the mahunt might be able to exercise. He was not at all sure that Suriya thought of practising the art; he could think of no reason for such conduct except the pleasure that the East feels in the possession of power of control over his fellow-man. Basildon recalled the vision of the amma conjured up by the sadhu, another expert in the art; and how it was dominated by a second vision produced by his own brain. With suddenness he had recourse to the same aid. In his imagination he called up the image of the woman who had entered his life. Again fancy played the same part. Between the glittering stone he seemed to see the face and it was upon her features and not upon the point of light that his eyes were fixed. He was against the dreamy lethargy that was settling upon him, drawing his inclination towards the verandah of his bungalow, the soothing and the seductive doze. Could Carvalho be right? Did the mahunt use his snake eyes for such purposes? It was difficult to believe; but, if it was, Basildon was determined to thwart him.

"The afternoon is warm," said Suriya, softly.

"Yes; here is your crystal. I can see nothing in it. I prefer to look for pictures in the smoke of the pipe. Excuse me," said Basildon, as they reached the bungalow. "I must go and sit down for half an hour."

He left him at the gateway and walked quickly into the house. The mahunt stood for a couple of minutes watching the movements of the Englishman who went no further than his verandah, where he seated himself in his long armed chair. With feet up and eyes closed, the Overseer succumbed to his drowsiness, before he had time to light his pipe. The watcher smiled. The conquest had been more easily accomplished than he could have hoped.

Three hours later the mahunt crept back to the bungalow. It was dark and Nellappa the peon was just leaving to go to his evening meal with his wife and little son.

"Is your master, the Overseer, within?" he asked.

"He lies in, I say."

"I do not see him; he is not in the verandah."

"He has gone to his room to lie down on his bed. The dinner is uneaten and the pipe unsmoked."

"It is the sun; he has been walking over the works of the bridge in the heat of the day. He will sleep till to-morrow morning and it will do him good. Tell his servant to see that he is not disturbed. Let him sleep!"

He repeated the words two or three times over in slightly raised tones. The peon made a deep salaam as the mahunt turned away. From the bungalow Suriya proceeded to the village tree where an unusually large number of people were gathered. Some of them belonged to the place, and some were imported work-people. Officers had come from villages lower down the river. They had heard of the removal of the amma's stone, and the feast that was to be held when she took up her new abode. The river and everything that concerned it was of vital importance to the residents on the lands that it irrigated. It behoved them therefore to join in any ceremony of propitiation that might be initiated by the people of Sirraloor. A natural love of poojah made the attendance a pleasure, particularly as they had no work in the fields to keep them busy. There was much talking and some of the younger men showed signs of excitement.

Near the platform under the village tree lay a

wandering beggar, a common enough sight in villages at all times of the year. Although huddled up in an old blanket and covered with coloured travel-stained rags, he shivered in the air as if he suffered from fever. The cause was difficult to divine. The man's legs, bare and dusky from his solitary wanderings, were blotched with large white patches, the mark of leprosy. The rest of his body was shrouded, but his feet and ankles could not be hidden. Rags were tied over his toes, more to hide the ravages made by the fell disease than to ease them. There is no known remedy for the complaint. He wandered on through remote villages and by unfrequented ways till he drops a crippled wreck by the wayside to rise again.

The sun had long since set, and the moon in its last quarter, had not yet risen. Two or three torches illuminated the scene fitfully. Very little was required for the pacific speech promised the mahunt. He was graciously pleased to talk about the coming ceremony and various other matters, in the tales that were disseminated through the land at that time. It was a condescension on his part to stoop to himself to the villagers; but owing to his caste and social position he was able to speak with authority and command their best attention and respect.

When he stepped on to the platform his eye fell upon the man. "Tell that fellow to move," he said, scarcely looking at the loathsome form in his abhorrence and disgust.

After a moment's hesitation an old man went forward to the recumbent figure and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"The master says move away from his presence," he said.

The beggar groaned and stirred slightly, pushing his blotched leg still further from the fold of blanket which should have covered it. The movement was understood to be a kind of protest against compliance with the request. As he moved the Brahmin thread that hung round his neck was exposed. It was stained with sweat and wear; but for all that it was as sacred as when he first assumed it. The villager drew back in fear. A low-caste man, had ventured unwittingly to

twice-born. If the twice-born, leper though he might be, were to rise and curse him for his sacrilege, he and his family would perish miserably to be born again as beasts of burden. He drew away and lost himself in the crowd.

"The beggar is a Brahmin!" he whispered, as he slunk away.

The information filtered through the assembly, and no one ventured to suggest again that the man should move on. Without paying further attention to the stranger, Suriya gave his address. It lasted an hour and was heard with deep interest. Then he dismissed the gathering, and returned to the rest house where he had taken up his abode for the night.

The torches were extinguished and the village sank into quietude. The night-jar sent forth a challenging cry to his neighbour; and the reply came like two skaters throwing stones at each other over the ice. The grasshoppers whirled in the dry vegetation; and the soft flutter of the owl moved the foliage as the bird slipped downwards to a lower branch whence it had a better view of the ground. It sat like a ghost with large watchful eyes and listening ears, waiting for the marauding rat, as the rodent drifted along from ash-heap to ash-heap in search of refuse.

A bandicoot, with eyes like polished black buttons, walked apart from the common crowd, dragging its tail in a straight line behind it. It approached the sleeping beggar, passing its sensitive whiskered nose over the bare white patches in eager anticipation. But the time was not yet. At the first touch the giant rat paused. The object of its inspection was warm and, therefore, still living. It drew back on its guard; and not a second too soon. The clenched fist of the beggar shot out quickly but not with sufficient celerity to catch the too familiar beast. The bandicoot fled with a warning cry of danger that sent every other prowling creature of the night to seek security.

The beggar rose without haste, wrapped his blanket around him and continued his homeless journey. He left no trace of his personality behind him except,



perhaps, possible contamination; an unconsidered incident that has no power of disturbing the mind of the oriental and the fatalist.

A little later Basildon astonished his servant by rousing him from his first sleep and demanding hot water for a bath.

"I should not have believed it of him if I had not heard it myself. I wonder what the fellow gets for setting abroad all those lies. However, we will soon put a stop to his mischievous tongue," said Basildon to himself as he washed off the brown stain. "And I don't care how soon he discovers the man who has tricked him--the poisonous brute!"

## CHAPTER XII

ENVILLE lost no time in following up the advice given by Southam to remove him self and his family out of harm's way. To turn his back on the place at such a juncture was not at all to the engineer's mind. Southam reminded him that it was not the province of the Department of Public Works to quell a riot, it belonged to the police, and his presence would be rather a hindrance than a help. Warneke added his vote to Southam's and gave a preliminary order to them all to come to his house as guests and stay with him until the worry was over.

As it happened Enville's bungalow at Madura was not ready for the reception of its master. The servants were in camp and only an old native and kitchen woman were left in charge. The invitation was therefore welcome and accepted.

"It is taking you by storm, isn't it?" said Margery. "What will your servants say to this sudden invasion of visitors?"

"They will say 'Master please'" and you will see what they can do on an emergency. You will be inclined to believe that they have been expecting you for the last week."

Warneke's eyes said more than his lips. Her heart gave a little bound. This tall, well-proportioned Englishman with the imperial manner might have been a reigning sovereign or at least a prince of some noble house. He was unlike any man she had known in her own country. She was accustomed to meet with physical strength often backed by a powerful will, but Warneke possessed the mental and moral strength necessary to those who have to deal with the problems of humanity.

and mixed nationalities, rather than with the problems of soil and climate. The growers from whom she purchased fruit were men of magnificent courage and endurance. They could put in long hours of labour without showing signs of extra fatigue. Their speech was simple and the topic of conversation was the land and its resources. Warradalle never alluded to his work. All she knew was that he was engaged for long hours in a public office called the kutcherry; and if soil and climate, drought or flood affected him at all, it was through their influence upon the people he ruled, and not through the effect of such vicissitudes upon property of his own.

"Your servants in India are wonderful people. I allow that they are servants in the true sense of the word, and not helps like our hired men and women," She said; and she noted the pleasure that her words gave. There is nothing the Englishman in India likes better to hear than a warm appreciation of his staff of domestics.

"The more you see of the country the more you will like it," he replied; adding in a lower tone, which was intended only for her ears, "And I want you to like it—very much."

"I wonder!" she answered enigmatically; but he was satisfied.

Josie was not sorry to leave Sirraloor for a time. The old ayah had been more than usually outspoken of late. Only that morning she had said—

"Not nice, this devil-tree business. These people giving plenty too much trouble. Missus go back to Madura for a few days."

"Why do you say so?" asked Josie, with an apprehension she could not conquer; she was aware that the ayah saw more deeply below the surface than any European could see, although she might not know everything. The answer was vague. It showed a knowledge of the temperament of the Hindu and the course he was likely to take under certain circumstances.

"Plenty drinking at heathen feasts. Then afterwards fighting, beating, stealing and house-burning! Very bad when no work got, these heathen people."

As soon as afternoon tea was over Warradale drove away with Southam, Mrs. Enville, Margery, and the delighted Daffie; leaving Enville to follow with sufficient luggage and the servants necessary for the few days' visit.

Long before the mahunt was expounding his views on things in general and on the war news in particular to the villagers, the camp was empty. Those servants who remained took the opportunity of giving themselves a holiday. Only Mary, the young ayah, stayed in the tents with Sunnee as her companion. She was joined later in the evening by Nellappa, who ate his deferred meal in silence. When he had finished Mary removed the basin and soup plate that had held his curry and rice.

Sunnee having said his prayers to his father—the child could not be induced to “tell prayers” as he called it, unless his eyes could be fixed on some bodily presence—rolled his fat round little form in his sheet and laid himself down. Hindu children are as much creatures of habit as the birds and butterflies. No clock is needed to tell them when to retire to rest; and no dinner-bell is required to call them to their food. The butterfly goes to the flower led by its own inclination and the scent. Sunnee followed the dictates of his nostrils as the onion browned and the curry-stuff hissed in the pan. When the sun set and the dim twilight came, the child of his own accord sought his hard pillow of cocoanut fibre and closed his eyes. The mother's gaze rested upon her sleeping son and thither followed his father's.

“The little budmash! the ugly little deformity!” she murmured.

“A burden and trouble to us all; of no more use than the strange leper beggar lying under the big tree!” added Nellappa, his heart bursting with pride as he watched the regular breathing of his son. “Even the gods have no use for him.”

Nellappa, like his wife, was a Christian; but he inherited forms of speech as well as of thought, which survived in the convert through more than one generation.

“What said the mahunt to-night?” asked Mary.

"I could not hear ; I stood outside the crowd."

"He spoke of the devil tree?"

"And of the river god ; such things do not concern us."

"Lie down, husband, by the child and sleep. Although the big master is away the overseer master remains and you have your duties at the bungalow as usual."

"In good time, in good time," he repeated impatiently. "Why did you not go to Madura with the old ayah?"

"The new missie said that she did not want me."

"You might have taken the child. My mother would have been glad to have seen him."

"She can wait till the camp breaks up," replied Mary, with a touch of indifference to a mother-in-law's feelings, common to the young Hindu wife in whatever class she may be. "Who would cook your food if I left?"

"The cook is here. I wish you had gone."

Mary glanced at him sharply ; it was not often that he expressed wishes or opinions. He was of a peaceable disposition, going through his duties mechanically and faithfully with but one object in view : the earning of the small Government pension awarded after many years of service.

"It pleases me better to be here," said his wife, decisively. "The chauffeur who came with Warradaile Dorai talked about the sickness. It is in Trichinopoly. When it reaches Trichinopoly it takes but a short time to travel on to Madura. Sunnee is better here."

"We shall all have to go back to Madura soon, sickness or no sickness. The rain is not far off."

"The bridge will be finished?"

"That will be as God pleases. The clouds are heavy over the hills, and the lightning begins to run about. If the bridge is not finished within one moon, it will have to wait till the monsoon is over."

"The contractor will not wait. I met his wife at the well this morning. She says he has another big business to do elsewhere, and that he cannot wait."

The child stirred in his sleep. "Appa! appa," he said, extending a hand towards the spot where his father usually slept. The call was obeyed, and his parents lay down by his side, Mary cooing a sleepy lullaby till she herself dropped off.

The following day was regarded in the village as a holiday, for it was to end in a festival.

Basildon was occupied with the contractor all the morning. At the man's request he went through all the building material which had not yet been used. It had been duly passed and sanctioned by Carvalho, who had handed it on to Basildon in the mass. The latter being precise over detail, was not sorry to look into quantity and quality, and satisfy himself that it tallied with the invoice.

After lunch he paid a visit to the tree chosen on the river bank for the new residence of the amma. A platform had been raised similar to the erection under the old tree, and the ground for a radius of fifteen feet had been cleared and levelled. As far as he could judge everything was properly prepared for the ceremony, which was fixed to begin at sunset that evening. He turned back to the village and sought the headman.

"Is everything ready for to-night?" he asked.

The man hesitated, and then answered that the sadhu had seen to the arrangements. Somehow the answer did not please Basildon.

"Is the amma content?" he asked.

"She will be when all is completed."

"Is the mahunt still in the village?"

"His honour left by palanquin this morning. Your Excellency may have heard the song of his bearers."

Basildon had not heard their chant. He would have attached no importance to the sound had it reached his ears. Palanquins carrying opulent natives were a common sight on country roads remote from the railway. He was not surprised to hear that Suriya had departed. The devil-dance and poojah would have no attraction for a self-respecting member of a temple mutt.

The thought of having to be present himself was pleasant. Basildon was aware that the tamasha was to end in a devil-dance, a hideous orgy in which drink deprived the partakers of every vestige of decency. He himself would not remain for the actual dance; his presence at that part of the ritual was not required; it was necessary, in the interests of Government that he should be at the initiation of the feast, the removal of the stone and the presentation of the offerings. The more he thought it over the less he liked it. An unconquerable repugnance to the ceremony seized him. What had seemed trivial and foolish assumed a new importance; it was a demonstration of evil; the deliberate opening of a door by which intangible evil might enter the hearts of men and prompt them to the perpetration of all kinds of wickedness. He was giving his assistance to open that door and let loose the devils of hell. It was true that the door would be opened whether he was present or not; but that fact was no excuse for his conduct. The whole scheme had originated with him, and he had provided the funds through the Assistant Engineer for the feast. Yet if he had not taken this course, what could he have done to avert the trouble that was threatened? Once more he took refuge in the thought that it was all a meaningless pageant unworthy of serious consideration. The evil was in the hearts of the people, and as long as humanity lasted there would be moments when that latent evil would be stirred into activity by one means or another. Those means might be music, drink, and dance; or they might equally well be thought and suggestion by word and by example.

As he stood talking to the headman, his attention was only half given to the description of the buffalo that had been purchased, and of the cost of raising the platform, and levelling the ground for the accommodation of the worshippers. In the middle of the "verses" and "hums" with which the chief of the village linked his sentences, he said abruptly—

"I have business that calls me to Madura. It would suit me to go to-night."

The headman was startled; he forgot all about the measures of rice and visses of ghee that he had provided.

"Master must pay for the removal of the amma," he said in a disturbed tone.

"Surely you and the sadhu can manage to carry out the ceremonial without me?"

"No, sir," he replied, with decision. "It is by your honour's arrangement that the amma's stone is to be removed, and she must understand that it is so, and not the work of the inhabitants of the village. If you do not attend, the stone will not be removed."

Basildon knew that the people held him responsible for what was being done, and that there was no backing out of it.

"Very well; I will be present; and after it is over we can allow of no more delay. I shall order the contractor to set about removing the tree to-morrow morning. The road coolies will soon level the ground and face the river bank with stone."

"If your honour gives the order to the contractor he cannot do otherwise than carry it out."

"Of course not! You don't think that the road coolies will make any objection, do you? They will take part in the feast, I suppose, and be satisfied that everything necessary has been done."

"The road coolies are not worshippers of the amma; and I cannot say what they will do. The people of the village wish your honour to understand that they cannot cut the tree down. Even now there are those in the village who are of opinion that the amma is not best pleased."

"Are we not doing all in our power to propitiate the amma?" asked Basildon, sharply.

The headman regarded him with a shifty gaze; with his large foot he scraped the dust, earth beneath his sole. The Englishman read the sign; all was not quite as it should be, and he was puzzled to know where the rift was.

"Where is the sadhu?" he asked, thinking that perhaps it might be as well to have an interview with



him, and find out, if the old man was not too sodden with drugs, what was wrong.

"He is at the river temple. Poojah must be done to the river-god also. He must not be angered by neglect. It is he who controls the floods——"

He paused with the sentence unfinished. A note of injury was struck which did not escape Basildon's ear. The Overseer controlled his impatience in the determination to discover the reason of it.

"Sa on; what is it that troubles you?" he asked.

"No sacrifice has been prepared for the river-god, and he demands it."

"You can do poojah to him later on; and if it is a matter of a couple of goats, I can give you leave to purchase them and charge them to the tree account."

He turned to go when the headman stopped him.

"Sir' Your honour will be there this evening?"

The troubled entreaty in his tone was very real. It touched Basildon's good nature. Irritated as he was, he replied kindly, intending to reassure the anxious village official who was held responsible for the people's conduct.

"I have promised; I will not forget. As the sun touches the horizon I will be at the amma's tree."

## CHAPTER XIII

A TOMTOM sounded in the village street. Its monotonous tone reached the Overseer's ears as he sat in his verandah. He had finished his afternoon tea, and smoked a leisurely pipe, which had helped to reconcile him to the uncongenial task that was before him. He rose and taking his cap from Nellappa, brought his mind down to the business in hand. His thoughts had been wandering. He knew that Miss Longford had gone with Mrs. Enville to Madura and that she was the guest of the Collector, a man of high standing, a bachelor with a large house and establishment that would be the better for having a lady at its head. He put the thought aside with all its possibilities and turned to Nellappa. It was the peon's duty to remain at the D.P.W. office until the letters for the night's post were delivered to him with permission to return home.

"You go; I shall not want you again. Shall you be present at tamasha to night?" asked Basildon.

"I, sir! I am a Christian. Your honour knows that our priests forbid us to attend heathen feasts."

"They are right; yet——"

He paused. It was not necessary to speak out his thoughts to a servant or ask for an opinion on his own conduct. With the quick intuition of the Hindu the man understood.

"Master goes to-night by order of the Government, if your honour ordered me to attend should I disobey? I should go, wearing my office belt; and when master returned, I should return also."

"You would go as a Government servant and not as a worshipper?"

"Master has spoken."

"And no harm would come to you and no penance would be given by the priests? Therefore no harm should come to me," he concluded more to himself than the peon.

Nellappa drew a little packet out of an inner pocket and tendered it with deference.

"Will master wear this? It is a charm, a holy charm given me by my priest, a small picture of Saint Joseph. It protects from all bodily harm."

Basildon smiled; he was not afraid of bodily harm. A stout arm and strong fist would carry him through all the physical danger he was likely to encounter. He thanked the peon warmly, and refused the precious talisman. Nellappa looked relieved as he replaced his talisman. He was quite ready to lend it to his master, but he would have been very uneasy until he had recovered possession of it.

The rosy lights of the setting sun touched Basildon's white suit as he walked slowly towards the devil tree. A number of people had assembled already. They had placed themselves in a large circle round the platform. A way was made for him through their ranks and he found the sadhu and the headman already standing before the black stone. On either side were men with unlighted torches reeking with paraffin oil; and seated on the ground near the platform were two tomtom beaters who lightly touched their instruments with the tips of their fingers. The drumming was muffled to an undertone that was almost drowned by the babel of the crowd.

Basildon surveyed the circle of faces. The red rays of the sun fell upon their features; and in each countenance was to be seen the stirring of a deep emotion. It was not curiosity. The worshipper of the evil spirits of Hindustan knows what to expect. He has nothing new to learn. It is only a question with him of what form of manifestation the devil will choose. Will he show enmity? or will he permit himself to be propitiated, and restrain the works of evil prompted by his fiendish nature? The emotion written on the devotees

of the anna was fear and dread, the trembling of a weaker power before one that was infinitely stronger and mightier. Basildon might speak of the panjah as meaningless and inconsequent; to the people a semblance of a ritual and full of awe and import.

From the worshippers his glance went to the sadhu. The old man's eyes burned. Some deep excitement stirred him, and his features wore an expression that reminded Basildon of the vision he had had of the anna in the foliage of the tree. He looked up into the leafage above, half anticipating another psychic demonstration, but the ash-like leaves of the neem, trembling in the evening breeze that swept in from the river bed, had no picture for him.

The paper he had fastened to the trunk remained intact. At a sign from the sadhu Basildon advanced and detached it. A tense silence prevailed. The worshippers scarcely dared to breathe and before each man a hand was placed.

The sun sank behind the cloud-capped western hills, and with its disappearance the spirit-world of the Hindu was hushed from activity. The sadhu alone of all the anna's followers observed no precautions in guarding against the intrusion of the anna. He took up a position immediately in front of the stone and lifted his hand, palm to palm. In a high, jeremiatic voice he addressed the spirit of the tree, to the subdued accompaniment of the rattled tantom.

"Ho! Anna! lady of the village! honourable wife of the god of the river! excellent and all-powerful mother of these worms of people! Listen to the prayer of these miserable beggars! We have chosen a tree that will please thee! we have saved thee from desecration by the unknowing foreigner! The sacrifice is lifted and its blood is ready for thee to drink. With thy permission we will move thy stone and carry it to thy new abode, where the feast waits."

He ceased and the assembly breathed forth the tremendous cry, in a prolonged note. With its rise and fall the tantom gave forth their tones in wild harmony with the wail. When it had died down, the sadhu

turned to the company and called upon the headman by name to come forward. He advanced visibly trembling and fell on his knees, touching the ground at the sadhu's feet with his forehead. The sadhu raised him, passing a hand before his eyes.

Inwardly Basildon smiled; at the same time he again wished that he had not undertaken to play any part in this mountebank game, as he was once more inclined to call it when he saw the sadhu make the passes.

"Put your hands to the stone," commanded the sadhu, his burning eyes fixed on theirs.

The headman leaned over the boulder and grasped it in his arms. Throwing all his strength into his grip, he endeavoured to raise it from the platform. It would not stir.

The sadhu called up another man of good standing in the village, who approached with the same signs of trepidation as the headman had shown; and he knelt before the poojaree. He was ordered to put up his hands to the stone, and together they tried to move it; but it resisted all their efforts. A third man and a fourth were added to the number, and still the boulder remained immovable.

Basildon, as he looked on, came to the conclusion that it must have been originally fixed in its position with cement; and he was beginning to wonder how this unexpected difficulty was to be surmounted, when he heard his own name spoken as "his most honourable Excellency, the Overseer." He raised his eyebrows in surprise and glanced at the sadhu.

"The amra yields to no one but the master who has served the notice. Sir, we beg you of your goodness and favour to lend these poor men your help."

Basildon accordingly moved nearer to the stone and mounted the platform.

"Lift! lift!" he said to the four men. "Lift, I tell you, and pull the stone out of its bed."

Again they struggled. It was no child's play. The drops poured from their foreheads and their bare chests were bedewed, a sure indication that there was no pretence, no trickery in their actions.

"Will the master condescend to touch the stone," said the sadhu.

The man's eyes burned with increasing excitement. A murmur ran through the assembly. It seemed as if the people were adding their entreaty to that of the poojaree. The fire he had seen in the eyes of the sadhu was beginning to burn in those of the worshippers. The four men, strong and new, accustomed to hard work in the fields, glanced at him and gripped the boulder once more. It was no bigger than the body of a half-grown child.

"Will your Excellency lay a hand on the top of the stone?" said the headman in a low voice of entreaty.

The Englishman had to remind himself again that he was there solely to please the people; he was carrying through the work of his department with as little friction as possible. He stretched out his hand and laid it lightly on the top of the stone.

Instantly, as if by magic, the resistance gave way, and the boulder was lifted with scarcely perceptible effort on the part of the men. A ripple of sound indicative of satisfaction greeted the bearers, as they stepped down from the platform and stood before the sadhu with the boulder upon their shoulders.

"It is well! The amma is content. She has allowed her stone to be removed!" the old man cried in a loud penetrating voice.

"The old humbug!" was Basil'on's unspoken comment as he withdrew his hand. "Come along! servants of the amma! Let us get on with the poojah," he said aloud. "I want to go home to my supper."

"Go forward, my sons! and take care that you do not drop your precious burden," said the sadhu. "Go! go! Why do you stay?"

The bearers swayed on their feet but could not stir. They were to all appearance rooted to the spot.

"Place your hand on the stone again, Excellency," said the headman, the warm tints of his dark brown skin yellowing with fear.

Once more Basildon complied. The moment he touched the boulder the bonds that held their feet

loosened and they walked easily forward. The light had faded and the torches were flaming. They followed. Behind him came the tomtom and the torch bearers; lastly the crowd. The sound of the tomtoms was no longer indistinct and subordinate. As the procession approached the spot where they were to rest, the drumming became more aggressive and dominated the movement of priest and people.

Basildon had never before taken notice of the Indian drum. It had always suggested monotony, a note with no more expression than the whining of the grasshopper or the croaking of the tree frog.

Now, as he walked along, keeping step to the beat, the sound had a new meaning for him. The monotony was gone. It stirred strange activities in his mind and touched new chords. He was conscious of the awakening of an emotional excitement which he had never felt before. Vague longings gave rise to a restlessness. His spirit rebelled against restraint. Like a caged bird that suddenly comes to the realization that it possesses wings, which but for prison keepers it cannot carry it into new regions of pleasure.

Impatient with himself, he thrust aside the unrelated train of thought roused by the appeal. By force of will he brought his mind back to the task he had in hand.

"I am here to see this confounded old stone," he said to himself, "and we are getting on better than expected."

Although his hand rested on the stone his fingers began to ache. The bearers had so arranged themselves that he walked conveniently within reach; but not so as to obviate the necessity of extending the arm to the shoulder. Thinking that now they were nearly started they could very well finish their journey without further help from him, Basildon quietly allowed his hand to drop.

The effect of his action was startling. The procession came to a halt so suddenly as almost to lose its equilibrium. Their feet were once more firm

on the ground, and they were held in a mysterious grip that paralyzed all power of locomotion. They were terrified.

"Sir! sir!" pleaded the headman, "we have lost your touch. The animi will not move without you. Do you want her to fly back to her old tree with the stone?" He concluded with an unusual touch of irritation borne of fear.

Basildon replaced his hand, and then moved forward again, nor did he lose touch till they learned the facts.

The arrangements for the journey had been left to the sadhu. A wild scene met Basildon's eyes as he glanced round. At a little distance from the tree a large bonfire burned, sending out tongues of flame that illuminated the tree and platform. Two or three strange poor men stood near the fire. One of them stirred a small pot of boiling rice, another tended a earthen pot of butter. Others were tending a small campfire and sugar. Beyond the fire lay the carcass of a buffalo that had been decapitated, a big bowl was nearby.

The low platform erected before the trunk of the tree was painted in broad perpendicular stripes of red and white. The tree was also ringed in the same colours.

The men came forward to meet the procession and saluted. The eyes were directed toward Basildon, who did not risk hindering the proceeding by detaching himself from the party until the sadhu dispensed with his services.

With infinite pains mingled with awe the devil-ridden villagers handled the stone. It was slowly lowered into position, great care being observed not to allow it to move out of reach of Basildon's touch. The sadhu guided every movement, his weirdly bedecked figure illuminated by the flame of fire and the flickering light of the torches. One by one he bade the bearer relax their hold till no one was left but Basildon. The latter glanced at the old man, but an uplifted hand held him there.

"Wait, Excellency, wait!"

If he had not been influenced by a real anxiety to finish off the affair without a hitch, he would have broken away and turned his back on it all.



"Amma! amma! amma!" cried the sadhu.

"Ammâh! ah! ah!" responded the people in a prolonged cry, touching their lips with the palms of their hands in rapid succession.

There was a rustling in the foliage, and Basildon could have sworn that for the moment he felt a quiver go through the stone; yet he knew that it could not be so; it was fancy; the ceremony was beginning to get on his nerves.

"His honour, the Overseer, in the name of the Government, begs the amma to accept this, her new home. He himself places the stone," cried the sadhu in a loud voice and looking up into the tree. "By his order the feast of blood has been prepared. He asks the amma to rest and be content."

Again there was the same response from the worshippers. At a sign from the old man he removed his hand and stepped off the platform. As he did so he faced the people encircling the tree. The excitement in every eye was more apparent. Parted lips and heaving chests told that the reins of emotion were being loosened in the crowd. The expression on their countenances brought back to his memory the evil face conjured up in the foliage a fortnight ago. For the first time he noticed the presence of women in the company. They must have joined in the procession on the way. Both men and women had lost the placidity of their everyday life; they were overshadowed by the licence of the approaching orgy. It was as though evil in a tangible form had been let loose among them and was about to manifest itself.

The psychology of a crowd is a curious problem. When humanity congregates it loses the characteristics of the individual, and becomes a strange monster swayed by emotions not recognizable in the individual. The monster may be tractable, even amiable; but, on the other hand, it may be something quite the reverse. It loses the sense of individual responsibility which holds the unit in check. Its emotions ebb and flow in great waves, evolving an overwhelming force unknown in the individual. As numberless small streams creeping down

the hillside in puny strength combine to form the irresistible river, capable of hurling a bridge from its foundations, so the items of humanity, harmless in themselves, may combine to create a force that carries desolation and destruction in its path.

The mild-natured people of the village, tractable in their individuality, were welded together by their festival into an intractable monster dominated by evil. Passions were roused that could only be quelled by unflinching indulgence. It was indeed as if the anima had descended in spirit, and was already brooding over the masses gathered together in her name.

Basilion glanced round at the assembly. He became conscious that he was in the presence of a gigantic embodiment of evil, invisible but tangible all the same. He had more than once been in contact with a crowd swayed by anger, and he had witnessed the ceremonial of that anger in open acts of violence that the single individual would not have dreamed of perpetrating; but he had never before been face to face with the kind of evil that swayed the people now; for he had never been present at a heathen feast. From a distance he had seen figures moving in the flickering light of torches, and had heard the tom-toms and tremulous wailing. Now, for the first time in his life, he was in touch with what he had hitherto regarded with contempt; and his eyes were opened to a new phase of heathen worship. He was in close contact with a crowd influenced by a debased form of religion. The quiet amenable village folk among whom he dwelt, and who obeyed him without question when they were employed on irrigation work for his department, were exhibiting an unsuspected emotion, whose origin as well as end could only be evil.

And his curiosity was aroused.

As soon as he had withdrawn his hand from the stone and had seen it settle down into position, he knew that his part in the ceremony had been played and his presence was no longer required. He might withdraw if he chose and return to the bungalow, where a neglected meal awaited him. But the wish to retire had vanished. His curiosity asked whether the evil

spirit would lead the people? In what particular form would it be manifested? How would it end? If the worshippers showed no objection to his presence, why should he not remain and see for himself how it would culminate?

He glanced at the sadhu ready to accept the sign of dismissal. As none was given, he remained quietly standing a little distance from the stone. The people took no notice of him; they seemed to have forgotten his very existence. Their eyes were fixed on the sadhu and his assistants.

But even as Basildon gazed at the wild unholy scene, his subconsciousness warned him that it was no place for an Englishman. Having fulfilled his mission, which was reasonable and legitimate, it was his Christian duty to depart. He stifled the warning, assuring himself that there was no harm in being an onlooker. He was not a worshipper, even though he had helped to carry the stone, and had walked in procession and provided the materials for the propitiatory offering and oblation.

One of the poojarees approached the platform, carrying a tray of wreaths. He garlanded the stone, and then turned to the sadhu and hung trails of threaded blossom round his neck. A second assistant brought long streamers made of tags of coloured cotton—shreds of yellow, red and white calicoes—and tied them round the waist of the old man. They fell like a full skirt to his ankles, and swayed as he moved.

After the adornment of the poojaree the ritual of oblation was performed. Hot oil was poured upon the stone. Camphor and incense were burned, and the head of the slaughtered animal brought and laid upon the altar. Balls of rice reddened with blood were ranged along the edge of the platform, a ghastly offering that marred any beauty the flowers might have given to the ceremony.

The sadhu began a chant in a nasal sing-song voice. The words were addressed to the amma. Basildon understood the language, and the hot blood chased through his veins as he listened. The bowl he had seen by the carcase was carried ceremonially into the

oice of light, and the sadhu, whose excitement was beginning to border on frenzy, dipped his hand into the crimson liquid and sprinkled the stone. Then he turned and showered the blood upon the assistant project. Turning round the crowd he threw it far and wide over the urging, ecstatic people, who raised their hands to catch the precious drops, so that none of it could be lost.

A prayer on the English man's skin—his white clothes. Whether it was thrown purposely he could not tell. It startled him, and he shrank back. The action of the sadhu had its significance. It included him among the worshippers of the amrita, and made him one with them.

The sadhu took up his chant again. This time it was a call to the people. In the terror it summoned them to give themselves up to the pleasure of the night to eat, drink, and be merry, in short. "Who, though her devotees would the nuna and her husband find pleasure also. Who would dare to restrain the carnal desires of the gods?"

The effect of the words was to inflame and incite. Blasphemous and unbridled lust was fast making itself visible in the attitude of the people.

A young woman with glittering eyes rushed past Basildon, her gaze lingering upon him as she passed round to the other side and rejoined the crowd. She touched the blood-spots on his coat as she went, as if in approval. He quivered under her touch, and again his better self was conscious of a shock.

Carvalho had once talked to him on the subject of spiritualism. He had spoken of a belief in the unseen presence of earth-bound spirits that could not release themselves from their old haunts because they were still dominated by their unholy desires. Basildon had smiled at the time. The sight of the woman brought back Carvalho's words with a horrible suspicion that after all the man might not have been altogether mistaken. The woman was not a disembodied spirit; but from her eyes there shone forth the lust inherited from her animistic ancestor. Their spirits survive in her

flesh, and through her body possibly might still be able to indulge their sensual desires.

Basildon was stung into uneasiness. That old-fashioned alarum of the human soul, his conscience, sounded its note and struck sharply at his torpid morality. Not content with recalling him to a sense of right and wrong, she summoned to her aid the memory of Margery. His mental vision was flooded with Margery's personality. Between himself and the evil that had been conjured up by the sadhu she intervened. Her eyes with their clear gaze met his as they had done on the night of their drive, when, having saved her life in the morning, he took her away from a dreaded loneliness, and they travelled together through the peace and beauty of the Indian night. She seemed pleading with him to separate himself from this ghastly heathen orgy; from the contamination of an evil that would render him unworthy to speak to her again.

Revulsion, disgust mingled with self-reproach for his own weakness killed the last spark of curiosity, and left him bitterly ashamed of having trifled with things appertaining to Satan.

The woman reappeared. She came closer this time, and he could feel the warm pressure of her lightly-clad body against his own. It was the infectious touch of contamination.

With an execration on his lips he broke his way through the crowd and passed out of the circle. He separated himself from the devil-possessed devotees, fear at his heart lest the devil should possess him too, if he remained longer, and deprive him of his free will to act.

No one took notice of him as he finally withdrew. The woman let him go with a careless laugh. There were plenty of men left to respond to her advances. The tomtom sounded in his ear, and the cries of the inflamed people came to him on the night wind as he hurried through the deserted village, cursing himself for a fool in having meddled with things he did not understand, and consigning the amma and her tree and the old sadhu to perdition, together with all the worshippers.

## CHAPTER XIV

THE lamp burned brightly in the centre room of the D.P.W. Bungalow. Sooba, Basildon's servant, slept soundly in the back verandah. He was a hard-working individual who combined in his person the office of cook, table-servant, and dressing-boy.

It was fortunate that Sooba possessed the canine faculty of sleeping at will ; otherwise he could not have fulfilled the many duties that made demands upon him at various times from early morning till late at night. Most Hindus have the gift ; but it stops short with the power of sleeping at will. The dog's ability to awake and regain its consciousness at a moment's notice is not bestowed upon the Hindu. He slumbers on through the first and second call of his master. At the third he rouses himself sufficiently to put out a hand in search of a turban. As soon as his fingers close upon it, he responds to the summons with a hoarse, " Coming, sir ! " Until he can recover the precious head covering he is silent, no matter how wide-awake he may be. Without his turban he is no more master of his self-possession than a European is without his nether garments.

The hot-case, standing in the verandah, contained Basildon's supper. A pan of charcoal kept the food warm. If he had not returned till the small hours of morning, the overseer would still have had a hot meal placed on the table and served without a murmur by the patient Sooba.

Basildon stepped quietly into the house and glanced round. He was relieved to find that his servant was asleep. He turned down the lamp and went quickly to his bedroom where he drew off his blood-stained garments. With loathing and disgust he flung them into

the tub of water that had been placed ready for his bath. On no account would he have been seen in that condition. The tell-tale splashes would have needed no explanation ; they told their own story. Christian though Sooba might be, he had an intimate knowledge, gained through heathen relatives, of the ritual of the heathen feast. The sprinkling of coloured liquid, or of the actual blood itself, was a sign that the man so marked had attended at a blood sacrifice and within the circle of worshippers. There was no gainsaying the fact ; it proclaimed itself in the blood-spots.

Basildon recalled Nellappa's reply when he asked him lightly if he intended being present at the ceremony. He dare not think what the peon's opinion would be, if he knew that his master had stayed on voluntarily at the feast long after his duty was done.

He slipped into a lounge suit, bathed his face in cold water and called to Sooba to bring his supper. Food restored his balance of mind and a pipe soothed his nerves. The tomtoming was still audible in the night air. It mingled with the other voices of darkness, the whirring cicala, the scream of the owl, the rustle of the wind in the palms and the cry of the ever hungry jackals. The tone of the Indian drum had a new meaning for him. He could distinguish in its notes the summons to the dance, the passionate rhythm that poured out a seductive invitation to self-abandonment and licence ; the droning and dying away of the barbaric music as exhaustion succeeded indulgence.

In the tobacco smoke he saw visions of the sadhu with his baleful eyes whirling in the fanatical dance, drawing men and women into the vortex, his streamers of coloured tags flying away from his lean body as he turned and twisted ; his long double-jointed arms were thrown out like some creature impaled, as Basildon had seen depicted on the walls of the temple at Madura. In frenzy the servant of the amma, fiendish rather than human, swayed and bowed, danced and posed before the invisible demon, communicating his fanaticism like an evil disease to all who looked on.

Men and women with twitching limbs and wild

rolling eyes joined in the movement, throwing their arms about in imitation of the sadhu. Convulsive fingers clutched at the garments that bound their bodies and preserved their decency. The seamless clothes were torn from their encircling folds and flung away. Men and women, drunken with arrack and inflamed by the devil, gyrated and staggered in unashamed nakedness before the devil stone, throwing decency to the winds in honour of their deity. Their wild actions were sanctioned by their religion. Led by their poojaree, who could do no wrong, they thought to give pleasure to the amma and propitiate her by their indulgence.

Hindu Christians are taught that to look on at such scenes is an offence against their faith. To be numbered among the worshippers is a breach of the first commandment for which the Israelites themselves more than once paid the heavy penalty of expatriation and death.

Basildon had deliberately looked on. Temptation had assailed him. And the thought of Margery alone had saved him.

He went to bed ; but it was some time before he could sleep. When sleep came at last it was heavy and unrefreshing.

The sun had risen when Basildon awoke the next morning. He sprang up with a vague feeling of being late and called for his early cup of tea.

"Why haven't you brought the tea sooner, Sooba?" he said, with some annoyance.

"Master very tired, I thinking," was the reply, as the man set out the tea-tray in a corner of the verandah where the morning breeze blew in from the river fresh and cool.

"You have no business to think. What time is it?"

"Ten minutes past six, sir," replied Sooba, stolidly, undisturbed by his master's reproaches. He knew more of the doings in the village than he chose to tell ; and he took upon himself to act in a manner that he considered to be for the best.

"I promised to meet the contractor at six. Get me out some clean clothes quickly. Run to the old devil-



tree and tell him that I will be with him as soon as possible."

Sooba left the room and retired to the kitchen. In a few minutes he returned to the back verandah and began to busy himself with some of his multifarious duties.

Basildon swallowed his tea, dressed and hurried to the spot where he had arranged to meet the contractor at six. The man was to bring a gang of coolies and cut the tree down under the personal direction of the Overseer. This in Basildon's opinion would place the responsibility on his own shoulders. Any onus that might still be attached to the sacrilegious hand that destroyed the former abode of the demon would rest entirely with him. He was even prepared in the face of hesitation or open opposition on the part of the workpeople to handle the axe himself, and begin the demolition of the altar on which so many sacrificial animals had been offered from time immemorial. A tradition existed that the ancestors of the villagers had once upon a time given the blood of their children to the annam on that very spot, but that was long before the rule of the English was established.

Basildon was anxious to have the tree felled as quickly as possible, and the old blood-stained altar broken up and levelled without giving the people time to reconsider the decision. If they had time and opportunity to discuss the matter, they might plead for only a partial destruction of their ancient sacred place. They might mark the exact site, which would lead to a recrudescence at some time or another of the poojah, and this would eventually develop into an obstruction on the road that would be extremely difficult to remove.

After their night of revelry, Basildon mightily concluded that they would all be sleeping late. He had intended having the spot cleared and dug up, and all marks of the position of the tree and its altar and stone removed before they were sufficiently awake to make any objections. It was therefore a source of vexation to find that he had overslept himself and lost what might very well be a valuable hour.

## LOVE BY AN INDIAN RIVER

hurried to the tree and looked round in astonish-

It was untouched and not a soul was in sight. For a moment, he concluded, had been, and not a soul had retired. It was annoying. He ought to have waited.

He returned he went on to the contractor's house, that had been built near the coolie line by the

It was deserted, as before the coolie line forming since burned, and no woman bearing brass pot from the river was visible. He walked the row of the mud huts. Every door was closed; no child or a dog remained to give sign that they occupied. At the end of the row of buildings he found the old watchman.

"Where are the coolies? Where is the crowd?" he asked.

"They are all gone, sir. Gone to work?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Where are the women and children? They must be somewhere!"

"Gone away, sir. They packed up their bundles, light and went to the station to take the night train while the village people were at the devil dance. The contractor left with his wife and child in a bullock cart. The mail train walked. Here are the keys of the

The contractor told me to pass them to you this morning when you came to the lines."

"That was true. Not a soul out of that large gang of coolies remained. Every man, woman and child vanished, from the master of the crowd to the smallest boy who earned his twopenny a day by carrying a diminutive basket of earth on his head."

Widdon was puzzled and not a little worried by the unexpected turn events had taken. Just as he was congratulating himself on the successful removal of the stone, matters had come suddenly to a deadlock, as face to face with a new problem. The workmen were gone, and with them went every prospect of completion of the bridge.

He was obliged to look to the villagers for help.

They were not experts at road-making and bridge building. Moreover they would refuse to touch the tree or the altar. He could not fell the tree himself single-handed, nor break up the ancient platform unassisted. Its foundation was formed of blocks of stones fitted into each other without mortar, like a Chinese puzzle. They would require strong implements as well as strong arms to displace them.

It was impossible to recall the coolies, for the contractor had left no address. In course of time he would unobtrusively present his bill to the Assistant Engineer for the rest of the money that he considered due. A refusal to pay it on the score of a broken contract would be met by the plea that the work had been held up through the action of the Engineer and his staff. The refusal would be maintained, and the contractor would bring his case into court. He would thoroughly enjoy the litigation, and be at no loss for any number of witnesses to support his tale.

Basildon saw it all at a glance. He knew the country and its people so well. A shrewd suspicion crossed his mind that the contractor had foreseen difficulty, and had thus slipped out of it. His coolies had heard much of the power and malignancy of the amma, and were in no mind to lay themselves under her displeasure by breaking up her altar. Sooner than run such a risk they preferred to forfeit their wages on condition that their employer saved them from punishment and imprisonment. Basildon concluded rightly that they had held a secret conference. Without knowing how the law stood, they accepted the contractor's offer to remove them to new fields of labour, where they would run no danger of angering a local deity and thus rendering themselves liable to all sorts of misfortunes such as demons inflict on those who displease them.

The more he thought it over the more his annoyance grew. If only the contractor had warned him that there might be an objection on the part of the coolies to touch the tree, he might have imported men from elsewhere to do that particular work. A gang of Muhammadans would have been troubled by no

malayer, and would have removed the whole in a single day.

He grasped the situation and realized that he must. It was hard to bear after all his efforts to remove the object without friction. There would be no removal of the stone from the tree, no removal of the stone at present; and as far as he could see, the work could not be completed till after the monsoon season and the floods had gone down.

Could he say to Mr. Enville? He had been told that his arrangement would succeed. It had

as far as the villagers were concerned, he had said so to himself. It was this fool of a contractor who upset everything by not taking him into his confidence. He must see his superior officer at once, and let him know of the serious hitch that had occurred.

Doing so, however, he determined to make an attempt to find the missing men. If he knew where they were, he would follow them, and try to persuade the contractor to bring his gang back. The most likely place to know where they were was the headman, and he took his steps in the direction of his house.

On the way he met one of the villagers who had been in the removal of the stone. He spoke to him and asked if he knew anything of the bride coolies and their departure.

The man looked at him with frightened eye. The color of the brown skin had yellowed. Basil don't like his society appearance to the debauch of the night.

"I know nothing of the coolies, sir," he replied. "I was one of the maistries saying yesterday that no one was to workpeople who interfered with the devil. It is true, sir. There was a stone in Tinuvelly which was accidentally broken some years ago by a long pole that fell upon it. Trouble came to all the men who were moving the beam and let it fall. One was killed, another died of cholera, a third had his throat cut, and his house robbed, a fourth—"

He interrupted him impatiently.

"I shall understand that the coolies might have

thought it unlucky if they had belonged to the village, and had been worshippers of the amma; but these men, who have been working on the bridge, have their own gods, and are not concerned with the poojah of the amma. They were not at the feast last night."

"They do not have devil-dances in their country," replied the man.

"Then why should they object to cutting down the tree after the stone has been removed and the tree forsaken by the amma?"

"It is not good at any time to meddle with the things that belong to the gods. The sadhu bade me lend a hand last night. This morning I have already taken a goat and a cock to him; and this evening I and my family will make poojah to the amma for our protection. The headman neglected to do so, and trouble has come upon him. He has fallen into a fit and breathes with difficulty."

"Did he dance last night?"

"The amma came upon him, and for nearly an hour he obeyed her call. He danced till he dropped down like one dead. They carried him home, and he slept till dawn. His wife woke him to give him coffee, and he fell into the fit. The amma was still in him."

In Basildon's opinion it would not have been surprising to hear that half the village had had fits after the excitement of the previous evening. If the headman was suffering from determination of blood to the head, it would be hopeless to expect to get any information from him.

"I suppose some one is looking after him," he said.

"The sadhu himself is attending to him and making magic——"

He stopped suddenly, as the sound of wailing fell on his ears. It was the wail of grief raised by women when death visits the house.

"The amma has taken his life!" said the villager in awed tones. "It was well that I sent the goat and cock early. I must go and prepare the rest of the offerings if master will excuse me."

He hurried away, first, to learn the latest news— a

terrible fear catching him by the throat—and then to prepare his own propitiatory offering. The news spread rapidly through the drink-sodden village that the amma was angry and had taken the life of the headman. The frightened people gathered in groups to discuss the catastrophe.

What did it mean? Why was the amma angry? Was it because the stone had been moved, or was the sacrifice unacceptable? Perhaps she would have been better pleased with goats instead of the buffalo. It was clear, since she had slain the chief man in the place, that she was displeased. It would be for the sadim to decide what was the reason and to suggest a means of pacifying her.

Meanwhile the village noted with relief that the old tree was still standing untouched and that the altar remained intact. It was as well that the contractor had taken himself off with his coolies. Had he been on the spot Basilio could have been at work, and the site in course of being levelled. An outbreak would assuredly have taken place. The dreaded riot would have been born with consequences reaching far beyond the limits of Sirrahoi—a fact that was not hidden from the Overseer.

## CHAPTER XV

ON the morning after Margery's departure—to get twenty-four hours—Sunnet made his toilet in the light, and was left to dress himself as he thought fit. The missie being away, his parents did not consider it necessary to exercise any supervision over the dressing process. To his great joy no one interfered with him. He ordered him peremptorily into garments that he himself put on.

For some time he sat in deep contemplation. His clothes, his fat legs stretched out in front of him, a little bundle resting on his knees. Finally he came on making the muslin strip do duty as a turban. He found it round his shaven crown.

Having disposed of the question of his head, the important part of the body to be covered, in the opinion of the Hindu, he hunted for his jacket. It was missing. In the absence of the missie, it had been folded and put away in Yann's box to keep it clean for future occasions.

Failing the jacket he turned his attention to the garment made by Margery. Since he was required to wear it each day, it presented a difficulty not yet surmounted. He could not conquer his invincibility by putting it to its proper use, and it required some ingenuity to adapt it to another. This he arranged in shawl fashion to cover his shoulders in the absence of the jacket. It was not a very comfortable position, as unless held it slipped off to the ground.

With a solemn face, as though he were weighing of the most serious problems on earth, he held the garment and studied it; his rounded eyes and pursed-up lips showed how momentous was the question.

disposal. Suddenly the little face puckered with pain, and he gave an ecstatic kick with his heels in the warm dust. The difficulty was solved. He thrust an arm in each leg, and the much misused breeches were transformed into a jacket, ill-fitting perhaps, but a jacket for all that, and which could be held in position by simply fastening the arm across the chest.

Then, with him self beyond measure, he trotted off to Margery's tent to say his prayers. The portah was gently moved a mile and a Sunnee step, and in a vanishing noiseless way towards the west. His face fell as he caught sight of the mahunt's curtains thrown up above the hillside. The bed was empty and the beautiful lady was gone.

He stopped short, and the smile slowly died from his lips. He peeped and peered about, like a little brown goblin the passing in some forbidden fairyland in search of a lost fairy. No sign of her was visible. He clapped his hands and cried "vahi vahi!" as he had often been summoned himself; but the call met with no response, and Sunnee once more wore an expression of perplexity.

He was confronted with a serious difficulty. In the absence of his grannie and of the new missie, to whom could he say his prayers? His father had gone to the D.P.W. bungalow, and was in circle attendance on the Overseeer, who was busy skinning stock with the contractor of various Government properties. His mother was out picking up sticks and dead leaves for fuel. She had wandered in the direction of the village, not without a purpose and was gathering news as well as firewood from every woman she met. There was much she wished to know—what the mahunt had spoken of under the tree the previous night; how much money was being spent over the annas' feast; whether Vahva's new thing was the latest was making a good recovery from the fever brought upon her by the annas; and many other matters connected with babies and marriages that never fail to arouse curiosity and interest in the feminine mind.

From his earliest childhood the Hindu is by nature



a slave of habit. Sunnee was already feeling the bonds of marmool—custom. His prayers were as much a habit as his simple toilet. It was in pursuit of his habit of "telling prayers" that he had adopted Maigery as the object of his devotions. Grannie, with her many duties to her mistress and her little charge, Daffie, was not always available, but the new missie had never failed him up to the present moment. Now both were absent, and he was altogether puzzled as to how he should solve the problem.

The cackle of the hen in the distance proclaimed to the world that she had faithfully performed her morning duty. It diverted his attention from his own perplexity. Following up the cackle he retrieved the new-laid egg and returned to the tent. He pushed aside the purdah and once more looked round in the hope that the goddess of the morning had come back. She was still absent. He seated himself by the tent wall in his old place and waited, the egg in his hand, his ears and eyes alert for the sound of her coming.

When the hour approached at which she was accustomed to dress he rose, and creeping softly to the dressing-table deposited the egg on the brush tray before the glass.

Then Sunnee stole away. The camp was silent. The servants had gone off on business of their own, glad to snatch a holiday in the absence of master and mistress. The snorting, spitting devil-car that never failed to rouse his fear was absent. Only the pony remained; it was being groomed by the slave. Sunnee stood and watched it for a short time. He could see his mother in the far distance, an elbow tucked into her side to support the bundle of sticks she grasped in her hand. She was intently listening to a long story told by a village woman who held a similar bundle in exactly the same manner.

The child left the tope and took the path to the river bank. He passed down the slope and arrived at the shallows; he paddled in the cool, limpid water, wading in places up to his waist, and moistening the lower edge of the garment that served temporarily as

a jacket. When he was tired of paddling, he scrambled out on to the island on which the temple stood. The pyjamas were removed and laid out in the sun to dry. Clothed only in the cord and silver ornaments and the muslin turban, he walked on till he reached the temple. The door, as usual, was open; and from the pedestal the river god gazed westward towards the birthplace of the river, the distant blue hills. It was a scene of exquisite peace; but the face of the image wore an expression of malignity that boded ill for that warm, sunlit repose.

Sunnee mounted the low steps and remained some time in contemplation of the hideous features. As he stood there the snake came noiselessly from behind the building like a cunning snake. He advanced slowly to the foot of the steps and stood behind the child, watching him with keen eyes. Over the boy's shoulders he could see the idol. The smile on the stony face seemed to the old fanatic to contain a welcome to the child, and a direct call from the river-god to his shrine.

Was it inherited instinct or the chance caprice of the moment that made Sunnee drop on his knees, put his hands together and begin to repeat his prayers before the idol? Was the action prompted by the spirit of one of the million of former worshippers belonging to by-gone generations, or by a malignant spirit that was unable to reflect itself from the road of good in a life-time of devil-worship?

The old man understood the attitude. He rightly divined that the child was addressing the prayers, taught by its parents and intended for the God of the Christians, to the heathen god of the river. With swift, silent movements he supplemented those devotions with the customary ritual. He brought a little tray from the den behind the temple containing the accessories of pagan worship; he laid out a small quantity of rice, butter, sugar, and fruit; and he hung a garland of oleander blossom over the neck of the image. An oil lamp was produced—a cotton wick floating in oil—and a saucer of burning charcoal. He sprinkled the charcoal with camphor and incense and covered the boy, waiting

the blue smoke about till it enveloped the image and gifts and the child.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mary had no duties to keep her in the camp beyond dusting the furniture in the sleeping-tents; and this she did later when the sun was too hot to make it pleasant to be out in the open. Having gathered sufficient firewood to cook her husband's dinner and her own, her thoughts turned to Sunnee, and she idly wondered what had become of him. She called, but received no answer. The syce volunteered the information that he had seen the boy go towards the river. She would probably find him paddling in the shallows between the river bank and the island.

This information did not alarm her. The stream was gentle, and the water in that part of the river was not deep enough to drown him.

She pursued a leisurely way, passing down the bank by the tufts of pampas grass and keeping a close survey of the ground, lest she should tread upon some stinging insect or reptile basking in the sun. She crossed the stream by the stepping-stones, and not till she reached the island did she glance to right and left in search of Sunnee.

Suddenly she caught sight of the little kneeling figure before the idol. His folded hands and moving lips proclaimed the fact that he was "telling prayers" to the river god! Yes! it could not be otherwise! The propitiatory offerings were laid out in proper order, and the poojaree stood behind him as he stood behind the children brought by heathen parents to do poojah when they were ill.

Her blood ran cold with the shock, and a great terror seized her. This was the sadhu's doing. He had beguiled the child into an action that placed him in the power of the river god. The priests of her Church taught—and they were not to be doubted—that any participation in heathen worship would bring about disaster, probably death. The miserable little budmash! The worthless little beggar! How dared he do such a thing?

With hurrying footsteps she rushed forward and

snatched the boy up in her arms. He had just completed the last formula, and was well pleased with himself for having successfully accomplished his prayers without check or hindrance. In his delight he gave a joyous kick and squealed with satisfaction, crying to his mother to let him go back to the water.

"Ah! bah! yemmah! yemmah! yemmah!" cried Mary, turning on the sadhu with as much anger as she dared to show towards a man who had power to bring down misfortune on her head. His smile of grim triumph did not reassure her. She would have brushed past him with a few muttered words of reproach, but he put out his hand and stopped her.

"Stay, daughter; there is no hurry. The child has done no harm."

"He is a Christian! His father is a Christian!" she gasped.

"What of that? Does not the river god bring down the flood for all alike, Christian and Muhammadan as well as his worshippers? What have you to fear?"

"Sickness for the child!" she gasped.

"There will be no sickness for him. He is well liked by the river god and is often here. Give money, daughter, and all will be well."

Too terrified to refuse, Mary opened the little bag she wore at her girdle and took out half a rupee. The old man's eyes glistened at sight of the silver and he grunted his satisfaction.

"Have no fear," he repeated, as he secreted the money in the rags that served him as clothes. "I tell you that the little one is favoured by the river god and no harm will overtake him. Let him come down here as often as he likes, and the river god will call the water from the hills and give fertility to the land."

Mary hurried away with a beating heart, partly reassured but by no means happy. She considered it her duty to punish Sunnee, and it was done with no light hand. She decided not to tell her husband of the incident. It was extremely probable that he would reproach her for not keeping better watch over Sunnee's strayings.

On his return to his midday meal Neilappa observed the tear-stained face of the boy and asked what offence he had committed. Mary said something not very coherent about disobedience. Her husband was aware of the child's courage in bearing pain without a murmur; moreover, he noted with pity that the tender skin was marked by the stick. He concluded therefore that the beating must have been severe.

"Was it necessary to punish like that?" he asked, laying a tender hand on the swollen lines.

"He has been a very bad boy and I have beaten him well. That is the only way to teach him good sense," she replied with some warmth, and still apprehensive that the child's action would bring retribution in some form or another.

"What did he do?" asked Nellappa. His heart ached for the unhappy little fellow as he caught the occasional sob that followed a flood of tears and heavy weeping.

"He went off by himself to play by the river! Aiyoh! a snake might have bitten him. The grass on the river bank is full of snakes and scorpions."

"He is full young to beat."

"We must give plenty stick to make a good son, husband," replied Mary, who in no way repented of her severity.

Sunnee and his father exchanged glances, and the boy took comfort in the love he saw in his eyes. He crept into his father's arms and nestled there. A few minutes later sleep had overtaken the little fellow and his pains and troubles were forgotten.

Until the old ayah departed Mary had not realized all that Yann, in her quiet way, did for her grandson. Daffie was constantly with her mother; beyond assistance in dressing she required but a small amount of attention. All Yann's spare time was occupied with the boy; and great was the love that existed between the two. Sunnee missed his grannie more than a little, and was often at a loss to know what to do with himself during her absence.

After her alarm in the morning Mary took good care

not to allow him to wander out of her sight. When she went to the tents that afternoon to tidy up and close them for the night, she took Sunnee with her. He was still rather a sad little person. She had deprived him of his turban and drawers as a further punishment, and he wore nothing but his cord girdle and silver ornaments.

On Mrs. Enville's dressing-table stood a frame containing a large photograph of Margery. Mary took it up and looked at it. She turned to Sunnee, who was standing dejectedly at the entrance of the tent, keeping a melancholy eye upon his mother lest he should forget and transgress again. Nature has so many attractions for a child, a bird, a butterfly, a leaf tossed in the wind will call irresistibly, and, forgetful of all commands, he runs after it.

"Come here, little humbush; see! who is this?" she asked, holding up the photograph.

The boy recognized the face, and in his delight brought the palms of his hands together with a clap of glee. It was the beautiful lady, the princess who had suddenly come into his life, and then as unaccountably disappeared from his horizon. He was overjoyed to see her again.

Mary placed the frame on a corner of the dressing-table where he could obtain a full view of the picture. In wonder and admiration he stood in front of it, not sure if the shadowy missie would smile at him. Occasionally he raised his hand in a salaam. When Mary had finished her work she led him back to the servants' quarters, and he turned many longing glances at the wonderful picture until the purdah in front of the entrance was securely fastened, and the sight shut out.

That night the peon and his wife sat up long after their usual hour for retirement. The child was between them and still awake. The new tree chosen for the anima was not far from the camp. To reach it the procession passed on the outskirts of the tope. It was within sight, and they caught glimpses of it through the trees as it moved along with flaring torches and the droning of the tomtoms. The rest of the servants being

heathens had joined in the crowd out of curiosity, and Nellappa was left in charge of the tents.

Both husband and wife were well acquainted with the details of the worship, and also of the orgy that followed. They understood the voice of the tomtom, varying with each mood of poojarce and people. With an absence of all reserve, common to Hindu parents of every caste and class, they spoke very plainly of the ritual; of the killing of the buffalo and spilling of its blood; of the offerings and the demoniac dance by which the amma was to be cajoled into a benignant humour.

Their attitude towards the ceremony was peculiar. No persuasion would have induced them to join voluntarily in the worship; they shrank from it with genuine fear and horror. It would have meant disaster for them in this life and in the next. At that point, however, their opposition ended. Neither of them would have lifted a finger to obstruct or prevent the performance of the poojah from taking place. They firmly believed that the amma existed as a potent agent for evil. It was necessary for the safety and well-being of the village, and all who resided in it, that this power of evil should be propitiated and rendered harmless. The inhabitants being devil worshippers were the right people to do it.

As they sat there, the peon's fingers feeling for his charm, Mary's hand resting upon the rosary she wore round her neck, they marked the progress of the ceremony through all its phases with an unconscious satisfaction. It had to be done; and those, who were licensed to do it, were fulfilling the ritual in a manner that should save the village from the malignancy of the very worst devil that existed.

The rising sun was throwing its pure golden light on the dark corners of the earth when they awoke. According to Hindu mythology the evil spirits were driven by its rays into retirement and inaction.

It was late when Nellappa started out for the D. P. W. bungalow. On the way he encountered one of the village women. She looked so terrified that he stopped to inquire what was the matter. In disjointed sentences

He said something about the headman being ill. As the joint village carpenter appeared, and Nellappa took a to him for an explanation. His speech was more coherent; and from him he learned the story of the events of the preceding night and of the morning.

In stead of going straight on to his work Nellappa turned back and ran to his store to the camp. At the risk of being blamed for unpunctuality he went back to his wife and warned her to stay where she was. If the amma was displeased as the carpenter had stated it was important that neither he nor Mary should identify themselves with the people who had incurred the wrath of the goddess.

Mary had gone to Margery's tent to draw up the purdah, to put the bedding out in the sun to air, and to busy herself with various other duties, which she as faithfully performed as if her mistress's eye was upon her. Surprised, quiet and obedient with the memory of yesterday's punishment still fresh in his mind, sat in his accustomed place by the canvas wall of the tent. His black eyes rested sorrowfully on the empty bed. To Mary's intense astonishment her husband appeared at the entrance.

"Husband! are you ill? What has happened?"

"Come here; I have news for you."

She joined him outside and he told her of all that had occurred; how the stone had been moved, the dance had been properly performed; the contractor and his coolies had disappeared, and lastly that the headman was dying in a fit. The people said that the amma was killing him, because he had touched the stone and helped to carry it without making a sacrifice himself.

Thrilled with the story Mary left her work to find the cook, who was an authority in the camp, and had just come in from the market. He being a heathen had been present at the festival and would know if the tale were true. He corroborated everything Nellappa had said. The headman was already dead and the whole village was seething with excitement. He further informed them that, acting under the advice of the scribe, the three men, who had assisted in removing the stone,



were preparing a second sacrifice of blood with the usual offerings. In addition they were strongly recommended by the sadhu to present a gift of money with the animals; he assured them that if they would entrust him with it, it should be spent in the propitiation of the amma.

Many of the worshippers who had taken part in the ceremony, although they had not touched the stone, desired also to give a donation in some form or another towards this second sacrifice. The offering of the buffalo, the sadhu explained, had been acceptable to the amma, but it had been contributed by the Overseer. The amma regarded it as his gift and his alone. Had she not shown that this was the case by choosing him out from the rest to lift the stone? When others attempted to move it, it held fast like a rock. The Overseer had but to lay his hand upon it, and it became a feather weight. On the part of the worshippers also there had been no offerings. "Not a pice!" added the sadhu, scornfully. It was an oversight which must be remedied as soon as possible.

All this and a good deal more the cook repeated to a circle of listeners that included the staff of the camp. At the conclusion of his tale he made a collection on the spot, which he undertook to hand over to the sadhu in the name of the servants. He glanced towards the peon and his wife, but they were withdrawing. It was understood that they were forbidden to give, and they were not pursued.

"Wife," said Nellappa as they moved away from the kitchen tent. "You will stay in camp all day. If there is anything that you want from the village the cook will get it for you. Keep your eye on the child——" They both looked round suddenly remembering that they had not seen him lately. "Where is he? Where is the boy?" asked Nellappa, with some concern.

Mary's face was overcast with fear. Had he gone to the temple on the island? Had the river god called him to his shrine?

"Run, husband, run to the river temple and see if he is there!" she gasped.

"Why should I go to the temple?" asked Nellappa,

who knew nothing of the previous morning's visit. "He is not likely to have wandered so far from the camp. Where did you leave him? Was he with you when I called you?"

"We left him in missie's tent," she exclaimed, relieved at the discovery. "Aiyoh! that child! the bad, wicked boy! He slips off by himself as soon as my back is turned. I must beat him again."

"If you touch him again I will give you the bamboo yourself!" resented Nellappa, angrily. Quiet as he was he had his turning point. His paternal love was tried more than a little to see how she had treated the child the day before, and he was determined that it should not be repeated.

"I know he has fallen into the river and is drowned," he said, beginning to cry.

"Come along, you foolish woman; you have no sense without your mother to look after you. Come back to the place where you left him."

They hurried to Margery's tent, but he was not there.

"Go to the river, I tell you. I know he is drowned!"

Nellappa snorted with scorn, and passed on to the mistress's tent. He looked in and held up his hand to silence his wife, who was ready to rush at her child with angry words.

In front of Margery's picture knelt the boy. His hands were placed together, and his eyes were lifted trustfully to the smiling face. Happy beyond measure in having found her again, he was repeating his morning prayers with all the reverence his grandmother had so carefully taught him.

## CHAPTER XVI

THE peon was satisfied as to the safety of his son. With many injunctions to Mary to be gentle with the boy, he hurried away to the D.P.W. bungalow.

Bisildon had come back ; but was in his room, busy packing his suit-case. He was too much perturbed by all that had happened, and was still happening in the village, to note that the peon was late.

The ferment was increasing ; and he was convinced that the sathu was fostering it for his own purposes. There was money in it ; money that could be squeezed out of the credulous villagers. An angry village devil is a valuable asset to its poojarce at any time. Just now, when the water on which their crops depended was due, an irritated demoness was a little gold-mine in her way to the guardian of her shrine.

He must see his superintending officer and report the various incidents that had occurred—the disappearance of the contractor and his coolies ; the partial failure of his scheme for the removal of the tree ; and the growing dissatisfaction in the village. It was troubling to have to report a fiasco, but such he recognized the affair to be. If time had been no object, he might have waited for the return of Enville ; but with the approaching monsoon, and consequent necessity of finishing the repair of the bridge, he could not afford to wait ; each day that passed was of importance ; and he came to the conclusion that it would be as well to go to Madura with as little delay as was possible. He called to the peon from his room.

"Nellappa ! tell the syce that I shall want the pony and trap. It must be ready at half-past nine. I am

going to the station to catch the midday train to Madurai."

"Very good, sir."

In less than five minutes the peon returned with the information that the pony was too lame to travel so far.

"Lame! I've never known the pony go lame before!" said Basilton. "What's the matter with it?"

"Lag s'w'le, perhaps a scorpion sting."

Basilton left his packing and hurried round to the stable behind the bungalow. It was true; the pony's leg was swollen from the knee to the fetlock, and a journey was out of the question. He could find no cause for the lameness except a small mark on the fetlock for which the syce could not account. As the skin was uninjured, he did not attribute it to a blow. It might have been caused by the heel-rope if the animal had stretched his fetters to their full extent; or, which was more probable, the syce had not given the pony length enough of rope. Directing the man to apply cold water to allay the swelling, he sent the peon off hot foot to borrow Enville's pony which had been left behind in camp.

Here was a second check. The pony was out with the syce for exercise; and no one could say in which direction he had gone, nor when he would be back.

Basilton was puzzled to know how he was to reach the station. A country cart with a pair of trotting bullocks might do the journey to the station in time; but he did not know of any cattle of the kind to be hired or borrowed in the village. It was impossible to walk the distance in the heat of the sun. The syce was more than a little concerned, seeing that his master was manifestly troubled.

"Shall I go into the village and see if I can get a bullock-cart or borrow a pony, if there is such a thing in the place, sir?" he asked.

"Yes; and be as quick as you can."

Basilton returned to his room and finished his preparation. In ten minutes the syce presented himself at the back verandah. He had heard of a man who

happened to be passing through the village with an empty cart drawn by a fast-trotting bullock. The driver offered to take the master to the station in two hours and a half. He was a stranger returning home after having carried a fare on the previous day. He had spent the night at the rest-house, and his animal was fresh, and well able to do the journey.

Basildon closed with the offer, and considered himself fortunate to have found a vehicle that could carry him to the station in the time.

"You will come with me," he said to Nellappa.

"To Madura, sir?"

"Certainly; go to the camp and get what you require for the trip; and come back here with the cart. See that the man is punctual."

Basildon spoke with unnecessary sharpness. He was irritated, and conscious of feeling as if he wanted to kick somebody. As a rule he had no difficulty in keeping his temper; but to-day he would have liked to have beaten his own syce for allowing the pony to injure itself; and he could have beaten Enville's man as well for being out with the other pony. Yet the syce was only doing his duty in exercising the animal. There was no doubt about it. He was in an evil temper, and he knew it. He was the more annoyed because he could assign no direct cause for it. The disappearance of the contractor and his gang of coolies did not help to smooth matters down; and when he thought of the sadhu and the ferment in the village, a swear word escaped his lips; and Basildon was not in the habit of using bad language.

"The devil's got into me somehow; that's plain. I was too near him last night, perhaps," he said, as he pulled himself up with a jerk, and tried to recover his normal temper.

There was no delay. Nellappa was at the bungalow half an hour before it was necessary to start; and he brought the conveyance with him. It was a small light two-wheeled cart such as is used in the south of India. The bullock that drew it was capable of trotting five miles an hour on a good road. The bottom of the

cut was a level plane. The passenger had the choice of sitting tailor fashion, or with his feet resting on a board suspended from the back of the cart. The vehicle had no window, and afforded a very limited view of the road. The driver's broad back filled in the opening in front and a piece of grass matting hung before the opening at the back to screen off the sun.

Basildon's suit-case was deposited beside the driver, who covered it with his blanket saying that he would look after it. The peon seated himself by the driver, placing his own little bundle near the suit-case.

Basildon had breakfasted. He lighted his pipe, and crept into the cart like a rabbit into a hole. He was glad to have a means of reaching the station, but at the same time he did not look forward to two and a half hours' travelling under such cramped conditions.

They started, and he was pleased to find that the bullock was fresh, and a good trotter. After some fifty minutes of steady going, he called to the man to stop. The road was bordered with trees that threw a shade across the way. He determined to take advantage of it and stretch his legs with a walk. To avoid the dust raised by the wheel, he went on in front directing the driver to keep behind him. The peon followed his master's example, and walked too. At the end of a mile Basildon got in again; and they proceeded at a good pace, considering the steed.

Suddenly the driver began to fidget. He stopped the cart and in great distress said that he missed the gentleman's suit-case. The cart being empty and its floor polished by much use, the case must have slipped along to the back and fallen into the road. He asked if he should turn round and look for it. They would be sure to find it in the road. Very few people were travelling; and none had passed for the last half hour.

There was no time to do as he suggested if Basildon wished to catch his train. To lose it meant a long wait at the station for the afternoon mail, by which he and Mary had come up from Tuticorin.

'Wellappa, you had better go and look for the case

You need not try to catch this train. Co Madura by the afternoon mail. You will be of time for that. In the mean while you can thing to eat at the travellers' bungalow."

"Very good, sir."

The peon made no objection nor comment ; thing in his manner showed that he was not satisfied with the arrangement. His eye remarkable for their intelligence, were fixed on the puzzled expression on the driver. It was Nella to obey when an order was given ; so he stepped from his seat, and taking his little bundle of property, prepared to go back and look for the case. He watched the cart as it retreated till out of sight. Then divesting himself of his turban, and belt as quickly as possible he placed the bundle. It was done for comfort and travelling as well as for speed. It was his to join his master, if it was possible, in time for the same train. He rolled up the long flowing and tucked it round his waist. To all appearance was no longer a smart Government peon imposing presence, but a sturdy coolie carrying on his shaven head. It is doubtful if Basil would have recognized him if he had passed the road. Enville would certainly have failed to do so, there is no better disguise for the servant, whose master is accustomed to see clothed and turbaned his own bare skin.

Nellappa started off at a quick run. A mile from the place where he turned back he found the cart in the middle of the road. It had slipped the driver had said. The peon wasted no time, he picked it up and set his face once more to the station, moving along at a steady jog-trot the cart, four and a half miles an hour. He had no chance of overtaking the cart ; but at the pace he was hoping to be able to catch the train his master was to travel by.

The smoke of the engine was visible in the distance when he reached the entrance of the station

waiting to reclothe himself he bought a ticket and pushed his way on to the platform. It was crowded with natives waiting to be picked up and taken on to Madura, where in a few days the large temple would be holding a festival. He looked round for his master. No sign of him was visible. He ran up the whole length of the platform out without success. The big engine with its cow-catcher and caged funnel steamed slowly by and the long line of carriages packed with noisy Hindus pulled up. The doors opened and streams of brown humanity poured out, meeting opposite streams eager to board the train.

Up and down went Nellappa, searching for his master; but no master could he find. A bell rang and another guard sounded his whistle. Still the crowd jostled and climbed and vociferated. The porters pushed the people inside and banged doors in a vain attempt to keep the passengers penned in; but to the very last the doors were reopened; and men and women with bundles and children tumbled out in search of compartments more to their liking. The sight of a widow or a sweeper or some other unlucky sign sent them flying to get away from the evil omen and find more fortunate surroundings.

At length the final whistles were exchanged between engine and guard and the train slowly moved away. Nellappa had strenuously resisted the porters' various efforts to shove him bodily into over-crowded carriages; and he stood on the platform watching the slowly retreating train as he had watched the cart on the road disappear with his master.

"Why did you stay behind?" asked the station waterman, hitching his tin pot on to the large water jar he carried.

"I could not find my master, Overseer Basildon."

"He was not here. I passed many times up and down. I should have seen him if he had been on the platform on the train."

"It is strange. He left Sir alone this morning to go to Madura by this train."

"His boyce has not been here."

"The master travelled by bullock-cart. Did you see one in the station yard?"



"There were several carts outside the station but I saw none bringing a European."

The waterman walked off to get rid of his jar. His work was done for the present and his midday meal was ready. Nellappa said no more. He went out of the station and sat down under one of the trees by the roadside to think; for he was puzzled. The crowd melted away. Now and then a man stopped to ask if he had missed his train; or whether he was waiting for any one. The idle curiosity of the oriental is great; and he does not scruple to ask questions until he is satisfied or the catechized is tired of answering them.

Mary had called her husband black and stupid, she should have described him as slow of thought. His brain was crafty but not quick in intuition. At the end of thirty or forty minutes he rose and strolled into the compound of the travellers' bungalow. No one was stopping there. The old matey had prepared and eaten his own meal; and he was quite ready to cook for Nellappa and gossip meanwhile. He had heard all about the devil-tree, the news had been brought by the contractor's gang. He had also heard astounding stories of the English;—that they were on the point of being exterminated by the Germans, that the Kaiser was on his way out to India to take over the country, and that he intended to become a Vishnuvite. The old man shook his head as he imparted this last piece of information.

"I don't like it. The English never talked in that way. They have their gods as we know, the Great All-father and the Christ. Have I not seen my old masters doing their Christian poojah with proper holidays every Sunday? In India we have our gods,—Vishnu and Siva for the high castes; the lesser gods for the lower castes; and the devil for the out-castes. The Germans have none, and a people without gods are not to be trusted."

"I am a Christian of the Portuguese Roman Church," said Nellappa. "The English have never interfered with us; and they always give us leave of absence on feast days. The German Emperor has destroyed the Roman churches in France and Belgium. It must be true, for

our sepoys have written it in their letters. They say that he will destroy our churches in India."

"Ah! bah! that is true! and our village temples also, unless we send him a large sum of money. I have already given two rupees and I have promised more; and I am a poor man. There is very little to be made in these days in a dakt bungalow, for the sahibs come in their devil-carriages and only stay to eat a single meal."

"Who asked you to give money?" inquired Nellappa, with a touch of curiosity.

"The porajnee at the village temple here. He has been ordered by the mahant to collect money from all the worshippers. Already he has over fifty rupees in hand ready for the mahant to whom it is to be given. But there must be much more than that, or the temple cannot be saved."

"What will the mahant do with the money?"

"Some ore from the Kaiser's army will come round and he will hand it over. There will be an inquiry; and if the sum is not large enough, the order will be given to burn the temple at once. It will be sprinkled with kerosene oil. A horn will be blown to call the people to see it blaze, and— and——"

Before the old man could finish his wonderful forecast a blast sounded outside the bungalow that made them both jump. The old man seized his turban and ran through the house to the front verandah. Nellappa hastily assumed his official dress and badge before he allowed himself to be seen. He would be disgraced for ever in his master's eye if he should appear before his presence in his nakedness like a common coolie. He did not doubt for a moment but that the car that had just announced its arrival carried the Overseer, who had somehow exchanged the humble bullock hackery for the more appropriate devil-carriage. Hastily adjusting his badge he followed the old matey.

In front of the bungalow was Southam, the police officer, in his motor car. He had with him an Inspector and two police constables. They were returning from a round in the district.

"Let us have some tiffin as soon as possible," said Southam to the old man. "I am in a hurry to get on. What have you in the house?"

A close cross-examination followed on the subject of food. At the end of it Southam's eyes fell on Nellappa.

"Hello! You're a D.P.W. peon, I see. Is your master here?"

Nellappa explained that Mr. Enville was still away from Sirraloor and that he himself was serving Overseer Basildon. He then described the events of the morning; and how his master had failed to turn up at the station in time for the train. Southam questioned him as to what accident he supposed could have occurred to stop the Overseer. The peon could suggest no other than a lost wheel or the fall of the bullock.

"If that had been the case you would have found him on the road as you went to the station; you would have caught up with him of course," said Southam sharply, his keen eyes fixed on the man.

The peon was silent. His brain was working slowly, and as it worked his mouth opened and the thick lower lip dropped, giving him an expression of hopeless stupidity. The police officer knew the look, and felt that it was waste of time to put many questions.

"You saw nothing of your master or of the cart, you say? You did not meet it coming back from the station, nor overtake it going to the station? Was it in the station yard when you arrived there?"

"I don't know, sir. I did not look. I was in a hurry to find my master."

"You are sure that he was not in the train."

"Quite sure, sir. I asked the waterman who goes up and down the platform and sees everybody. He said the master was not there."

Southam turned to the Inspector.

"If this man is to be believed Basildon has completely disappeared cart and all, somewhere between the station and the point where the peon was sent back to find the suit-case. I don't quite like the look of the case. While lunch is being prepared we'll take a run along the road,

and pay a surprise visit to a house I know of not far from this."

"You don't think that Mr. Basildon has met with foul play, sir?" asked the Inspector. "It is much more likely that the peon has overlooked him, and that he got away all right by the train to Madura."

"I hope that it may be so. All the same I know it's an old trick in this country to kidnap the chief witness and hold him prisoner where he can't be found till the trial is over. The house I intend calling at is temple property; and unless I am very much mistaken Basildon will be there, an unwilling guest of the man who hires the land."

The two constables and the peon were put into the seat behind. Southam and his Inspector occupied the front. The car was started and they proceeded on their way, the police officer driving. Three miles from the station Southam turned sharply into a road that forked into the Sirraloor road at an acute angle. Taken from the other way the turn into it was scarcely noticeable, a slight bend only to the left. They ran a couple of miles, the road curving still more to the left towards the river as it continued. Not a vestige of the cart or its passenger was visible. Southam pulled up near a walled-in enclosure that stood a little distance from the road. He jumped out with the Inspector.

"(One of the constables come with me. The other will stay with the car till I come back. The peon is to stop here. If I whistle," he added, addressing the constable he was leaving, "come at once. The peon can look after the car."

The country was flat and studded with palmyras. In certain spots they grew thickly. In others large patches of waste land or cotton fields stretched unmarked by hedge or boundary line—"the desert next the town." The heated air quivered over the landscape distorting palm and cactus and waving pampas grass. The glare of the midday sun deprived nature of its colouring and turned the palms black and the silvery grass white. A herd of buffaloes stood near a thicket of prickly pear too busy with the flies to feed. No

herdsman was visible. The patient beasts were waiting for their small guardians, who would drive them down into the river bed later in the day, where they would escape from their tormentors in the slimy mud of the stagnant pools.

With quick decisive movements Southam walked up to a small door, the only opening in the wall. He knocked and, without waiting, tried to open it. It was locked. After a short delay an old woman appeared. Her grey hair was tousled, and her ragged saree stained with much cooking and house work. She recognized the police uniform, and before he could ask a question she was down on her knees with her forehead in the dust at his feet. In such a position she not only barred the entrance, but she could not hear what he had to say.

"I am a poor old woman!" she whined with many exclamations of self-commiseration. "I have committed no robbery! The big master must have mercy on this poor worn!"

"Get up, old mother! I am not going to hurt you!" said Southam, "I want to know who you have here in the house?"

She did not answer his question, but repeated the formula, and kept up a running wail of self-pity and deprecation.

"I am a very old woman; I have done nothing wrong! Why does master bring a polliss constable to the house of this clod of earth, this lump of mud?"

The building was a cultivator's domicile, a small house enclosed in a protective wall. All doors except the one at which he had knocked, opened into the centre yard. Cow-sheds, grain store, kitchen, women's quarters, and men's room were contained within the quadrangle. The walls were of sun-dried bricks, and the roofs thatched with palmyra leaves. The constable a caste man, whose presence would not defile the place, was directed to make a search while Southam stood in the yard. The kitchen and the women's quarters were not entered. No Englishman would be hidden there with the consent of the inmates. Southam, himself, was invited by the old

woman to look inside the cattle-shed. Finding that the police had no designs on her own person, she took courage and became more helpful. Any doors that were locked she opened readily enough. She helped to turn over bundles of straw; to move sacks of cotton, and baskets of grain and red chillies; she drove a pugnacious little bull into a corner, and held its nose while the cattle-shed was searched. And when finally they routed out some children from behind a big chest, she threatened them with the bamboo for being, what they were, poor little souls! A lean pariah dog of a faded yellow tint yelped hysterically at them from the garden, and hush stone! with zeal. By the time the constable had finished his inspection the old lady had recovered her nerve and stood at attention, watching the dreaded officers of the law with more confidence.

"I made so sure that he had been brought here," said Southam to the Inspector. "Have you looked everywhere?"

"In every hole and corner where they might put an Englishman," he replied. He turned to the old woman. "Where are the men of your house, your son and your grandsons?"

"They have gone to Madura for the feast, your Excellency."

"Have you seen an Englishman go past this mornin'?"

"How could these old eyes look upon any one passing? I am only a poor woman living always within these mud walls. I never go to feasts, nor to the bazaar. All day long I cook and clean pots. As soon as the water comes down the river, the men will return and be busy in the fields from sunrise till sunset. They come home hungry and say food! food! give us food! and if it is not ready they shake the bamboo at me."

Southam walked back to the car through the blazing sun. He glanced across the level country with its palmyras, its patches of thorny scrub and cactus, its tufts of waving pampas grass, dried and withered till the blessed flood should revivify all into a soft green. The blue distance was already giving indications of the

lagoons on the horizon that existed only in the fairyland of the midday mirage. To search behind every bit of cover, every thorn bush and prickly pear, and to hunt every thicket of palms and acacia would be a gigantic task beyond his powers.

Half a mile away two or three toddy-drawers moved from tree to tree, carrying their short ladders and bamboo rings with which they mounted the palmyras. Their dark brown forms harmonized with the dull earth; and were it not for their movements they would have been indistinguishable to the European eye. Southam glanced at them and questioned his subordinate. There was no doubt as to their business. They did not attempt to hide it.

"They are toddy-drawers, sir," he said. "They haven't an idea beyond their toddy pots and ladders. I think the peon must have made a mistake about his master. I know Basildon; he is not in the least likely to be decoyed away or kidnapped without putting up a good fight for his liberty."

"We'll question the man again; he is one of these stupid Hindus only half awake to what's going on around him."

Southam was hungry; he knew that his lunch must be ready by this time, and he was anxious to get back to the bungalow.

"Peon! peon!" called the Inspector. "Constable! where's that D.P.W. peon?"

"I don't know, sir," replied the constable, who had been left in charge of the car. "He was here five minutes ago."

"Where? in the car or under it?"

"He was sitting on the ground behind it. I told him to look out for country carts. The drivers are asleep, and the bullocks may knock the yoke against the car in passing. He must be close by."

The constable looked completely puzzled, as if he could scarcely believe his eyes. The Inspector was speaking in the man's language.

"Are you sure that you are telling me the truth?"

The constable assured him that it was the truth; and

he began to search round the car and beneath it as though he thought Nellappa had crept into some chink or cranny in the machine.

Southam gazed round at the landscape for sign of the figure of the peon. He could detect nothing in the shape of a human being but the distant toddy-drawers, who were pursuing their work, and climbing the trees.

"I can't wait," he said with a touch of impatience. "I can't be at the peon's toy. Basil don has gone to Madras, and the peon has been taking French leave to attend some rotten feast. He has muddled his brain with drink; that's what is the matter with him. Get in a lot of you.

Southam drove off not in the best of tempers at having been told as you that he was beginning to think was a fool's stand.



## CHAPTER XVII

WARRADAILE'S house was one of those white palaces for which the south of India is famous. They were built in the palmy days of John Company. The merchant and trader had merged into the prince and ruler; when the servants of the Company received princely salaries, and their duties were political rather than mercenary. The mind of the Englishman was no more upon buying and selling; upon profit. It was directed towards developing the revenue of the rich broad land; and upon the peaceful and judicious alliance of the nations brought under the Company's rule. The chief aim was to enable the people to cultivate the ground, and to trade with safety. It was a policy which benefited both parties, the ruled and the ruler.

This peculiar work had its effect on the Englishmen who administered the Company's dominions. The Englishman felt like a ruler and lived like a ruler. He housed himself befittingly; surrounded himself with a retinue of servants such as would support his position in the eyes of the people he governed and lived in.

Tradition has much to answer for. The Englishman's salary is no longer princely, and depreciated, while the expense of living has increased. Still, the glamour of the position remains in the eyes of the native. The Englishman is still the ruler of the destinies of the cultivator and trader in India. In England it is a committee, a board, a council that settles the details of home government. In India it is the individual; and the individual fills the place of the state in consequence which is like nothing in England. The Englishman is the delegate of his sovereign, and has power to grant taxes or remit them; to legislate concerning

rights; and to force wavering municipalities and local boards into unwilling paths of rectitude.

Margery had been quick to perceive the ruler in Warradaile. A note of imperialism was struck that was fascinating in its novelty. Merchants, engineers, manufacturers, and all sorts of conditions of men in trade were common enough in her own country; but the "boss ruler," as she called him, was a new character, and she was impressed.

When she found that he was housed and served suitably she was still more impressed. A stout, dignified native butler ruled the establishment with a touch of his master's imperialism. Yet his deference to his master's guests was beyond reproach. To Margery he was particularly attentive. The signs of the times were not wanting. If at last his master's household was to come under the rule of a mistress, it would be a advisable to stand well with the chosen lady and obtain her good will.

Tosie smiled when the butler referred to Margery rather than to herself. She felt no jealousy, but was pleased, since it augured well for her scheme. If he could see the trend of his master's inclination, she herself could not be wrong in her own anticipations.

In the early morning Warradaile was usually to be found in his garden among his dearly loved flowers. There is no time like the hour of sunrise for an Indian garden. Refreshed with the dews of night the plants look their best. Birds open before the gardener's eyes. The curling tendrils bend towards the supporting tree; and the tender shoots redden in the increasing warmth of the sun. Large butterflies, like living petals from the hibiscus and plumeria, flutter over the azure ipomea and add their tints to the rich colouring. It is a fleeting hour, gone all too quickly; but during that hour the European assures himself that life in the East has its compensations. To Warradaile, who spent a great part of his time in a Government office, with numbers of native clerks in close attendance, it was valuable. He did nothing in the garden with his own hand. Pulling off dead leaves or snipping off dying blossom had no

attraction for him ; but his eye was everywhere. That silent supervision five brown-skinned men took and nursed the plants and trimmed the beds. Footed women, picturesque in their orange drapery, swept the paths with long brooms made of grass stalks. A boy, picked up stones and twigs and removed noxious insects. All worked silently and deftly like parts of a perfect machine.

Margery, issuing from her vast bedroom that had held half a dozen sleeping tents such as she had pitched in camp, found the lord of the garden waiting for her, smiling and self-composed. Together they looked at newly opened buds, rare tender ferns, exotic plants, that required coddling in a warm damp atmosphere and protecting from sun and wind. The suggestion she made was quickly adopted, and the next day she found that it had been carried out.

The grounds were large and park-like, turfed like the creeping grass of the country. Tamarins, mango trees, groups of palms, hoary old baobabs bordered the garden and shaded the grounds. No noxious vegetation, thronged with scaly insects and haunted by lizards, encumbered the place. The grass was carefully cleared of scrub, and the soil beneath the trees was hard and swept to the smoothness of a boarded floor. Here and there a camp carpet was spread and a group of people were grouped. If Margery rose from one of the sofas to go elsewhere on the impulse of the moment, with her sunshade or book behind, a peon silently gathered up the forgotten articles and followed her at a distance. They were missed, when he restored them with a smile.

Breakfast was at ten. It was a wonderful room, the woman of the Western world. Carved furniture of Burmese fitted suitably into the spacious dining room and a huge ebony screen covered with the figures of strange birds and beasts in relief hid the door by which the servants entered. The table was decorated with flowers. Three or four servants waited, moving and handing round dishes without haste and in a quietude, yet with a care and attention that left no room for any feeling of neglect.

"I feel as if I had the heart of a lion," she said one morning as she joined Wairadale in the garden. He was contemplating a group of white eucharis lilies, of which he was justly proud. "Life here is so soothing, so free from snare corners. Do you always live in this calm atmosphere?"

"When I am not up to my eyes in office work at the kutcherry."

The same indefinite calm seemed to pervade his speech.

"Your life there doesn't run as evenly as it does here?"

"Not quite."

"Work is not often heard of in a busy wheel," she remarked, considering him with an eye in which gleamed a ray of criticism. "Now our life in California, whether at home or in the factory, is full of the grind of its wheels. It keeps on hustling day and night; and, though you are forever striving, you never catch up with

all you want to get done. It gives you a sensation of unrest in the morning and dog-tiredness at night."

"Do you like the turmoil of existence in the West?" he asked, letting his eyes dwell upon her fine vigorous face with all its latent activities showing in the features. "Don't you think that this is much better?"

"I allow that it has its fascinations; but I am not sure that it wouldn't send me right off to sleep in time." She glanced at him and caught a smile upon his lips. "You laugh; which means that you don't think so. You need not tell me; I can see it in your face."

"Your life, wherever you were, would be too full of interest for you personally, ~~and~~ to grow lethargic," he replied confidently and ~~with~~ some warmth.

She shook her head in dissent.

"I just know I should hanker after the canning business, the smell of fruit, the steam from the vats of sugar, the rattle and noise of the machinery, and the hum of the workpeople."

She lingered over the category as though the memory brought pleasant visions of familiar scenes.

"Not if your life was filled with other interests."

"I couldn't live for tennis and golf, and dinner-parties and dances like the women here. I should want something better than running round in an eternal circle of amusement like a squirrel in a cage."

"You could secure a life that would satisfy you, if you chose to accept it with certain conditions."

She did not inquire what those conditions might be; perhaps she knew. She went back for safety to her original remark, and found to her dismay that she was still on dangerous ground.

"Anyway, it's good to be living here like a princess in a palace with servants to do one's bidding at every turn. It's mighty kind of you to give me such a good time."

"I'm not so sure that the kindness is on my side," he replied, his voice betraying a new note of emotion. "I am allowed to play prince to your princess. It is a part that I should like to play all my life." Then with sudden passion that took her by surprise he added--

"Miss Longford, will you marry me?"

The simple words conveyed much more than their plain meaning. No woman could doubt that behind them lay the love that had prompted the question. She had only to look into his eyes to read it there. True, it was newly born, since he had not known her long; but it was a pair of strong, glowing eyes turned to him with a look that might have been the earnest sentiment of the old-time blood that had not been so long forgotten. The sight filled him with hope, and he saw his pulse going out with that self-possession, taught by years of dealing with human nature in his profession, he sustained an attitude of calmness; he was far from feeling

"My goodness! you are slow," she said, in a tone of her colonialism.

"I am sorry if I startled you," he replied penitently. He had had no intention of proposing to his next thought. He had been so much into a young man's mind he intended

"I am not blaming you any," he replied, recovering himself. "In our country we take it as the highest compliment a man can pay a woman to ask her to marry him."

"And in my country a man takes it as the greatest gift in the world when the woman he loves gives him the answer he pays for. Mugery!"

He took her hand and she made no resistance, all the same she was bewildered and uneasy, not knowing her own mind, and unable to believe that he could be so deeply involved in the love he was showing.

"There's too much in it to say yes all in a hurry," she replied, with a little gasp. "I must have time to think."

Did she or did she not love him? It was early days to talk of love. She liked him so that she was certain. She had never met a man of his kind before. His masterly self-possession and dignity appealed to her. It was not self-complacency; it was the self-possession of the man who was able to bear and endure everything that fate might hold for him. Such a man

was capable of loving a woman deeply. Yet his very strength, while it attracted her irresistibly, awed her as a quality that might possess its difficulties.

"You can't say no?" he said softly.

They were not thrown on to the dust-heap all in a moment.

"Nor are princesses to be found and won every day."

He put his arm round her, and before she could do otherwise than submit, his lips touched hers and told her more than words could express. The sudden passion in the kiss appealed to her as no protestations could have done.

Then he let her go, retaining her hand in his. His touch was firm, betraying no sign of nervousness; and she felt her confidence return as his fingers closed over hers. He had no wish to frighten her into refusing or accepting him. She should have time. He was convinced that she loved him, but was too confused by the suddenness of it all to admit it.

Margery looked round at the beautiful garden. It was a fitting setting for their love. The eucharis lilies and the tender green fern that fringed their border was in harmony with the hour. The white pillars of the house gleamed through the trees. The palace was ready for its queen, the garden for its mistress, the man for his wife.

It was a seductive lure to a woman whose life had been cast in the hub of the Western world, where there was no time, no opportunity, no setting for dainty romance. The mental atmosphere of the East enveloped her and steeped her senses in its luxury. The noise, the turmoil and hurry of town life was exchanged for a marvellous world of exquisite peace, of sensuous leisure that allowed opportunity for pleasures which had been crowded out of her existence at home. In such a life there was no need to snatch at moments of recreation. Time would be found to read and think without a sense of neglecting an imperative duty—the mundane duty of making money.

He watched her as they strolled towards the house. Josie was on the tennis court, patting balls over the net

for Darlene's hen sit. Mary withdrew her hand, and  
in silence, Jessie had seen that it was lying. With  
dark eyes, Mary's eyes sparkled with triumph.  
She was too clever for the old woman, who had been  
for a long time. The old woman's satisfaction  
was not to be seen. The old woman's satisfaction  
was not to be seen. The old woman's satisfaction  
was not to be seen.

...in my.

"On the 1st of March, 1861, I was informed by Mr. Warrand, your agent, that you were in a hurry to get the

Margery did not reply to these disjointed observations. Warradale looked at her. His eyes still asked the question which had not been definitely answered.

"I shall accept it, in spite of your wish," he said quietly. "Can all I have to wait in to-morrow?"

"You are sure that you have the no mistake?" she replied, after a little while, when she felt that it to be true.

Margery could not let her prince slip from her fingers. She was, too much of a woman not to realize all it meant for her.

"I am free," he said softly, with a touch of that same confidence which carried him so successfully through his public as well as his private life.

"You look serious," said Margery that evening to her lover as they sat in the veranda after dinner. It was difficult for him, as well as for her, to realize the new relationship that had sprung up so suddenly.

"More than usual?" he asked, with a smile that she could not understand. It was such as might have been provoked by an inquiry on the part of Daffie.

"Yes; what a th- trouble! Are matters wrong in the office?"

He was amused at her pretence, and the smile became a gentle laugh. Somehow the laugh ceased out of place.

"We don't bring the office and its business home in India. We leave it all behind," he answered.

's that so? We'll "e don't leave our troubles



behind in California. Trouble split up between two people halves it. If I am to be of any use to you, you had better let me take my share of the burden at once and get used to it."

"You will never be asked or expected to bear any part of my troubles, Margery. A princess should lead a guarded life; else what is the good of her being a princess?"

"I am not sure that you are right. <sup>A</sup> way I have no wish to lead a guarded life, ~~as we~~ call it. We don't hanker after that sort of thing in the West. When we marry we go right in for better or for worse, and want to know exactly the hang of everything that affects the other."

The slang jarred on him ever so slightly. It might not have done so had she fallen into his mood, and not been so persistent in her endeavours to discover what was the matter. Moreover she was entirely serious, and refused to allow an element of lightness to enter the conversation. His smile disappeared, and with it the sense of humour that found a charm in her manner of expressing herself.

"Nothing is really the matter; nothing out of the way; nothing more than we have to expect in the day's work," he said.

"Then it is the outbreak of cholera that is worrying you," she declared, with calm assertion that was irrefutable, considering that what she stated was the exact truth.

"How did you hear of the cholera?" he asked in some surprise.

"Through your butler. It was simple enough. There was tomtoming this morning after breakfast, and a good deal of horn-blowing. I had a mind to go out myself and see what was going on; for I'm rather tickled with these heathen ways. I asked if the big temple was having a feast; but the butler said that the drums were being beaten because of a death. I questioned him further, and learned that it was a case of cholera."

"I hope you did not tell Mrs. Enville."

"No; it slipped my mind till I saw you looking as

if you had a funeral on your mind. Was the man who died employed in the kutcherry?"

"Yes; he was one of the clerks."

"A favourite with you? a valuable servant in the office? I know what it is to lose a man on whom one has learned to depend."

"No; he was not of special value. He did his work; but no better than the rest of the clerks."

"Then where is the trouble? I suppose you can get another?"

Warradaile roused himself. Since she meant to have the whole story it would be better to tell it at once and have done with it.

"As you know that the disease has come, I may as well tell you that it is a very serious thing for the town. We have had an influx of pilgrims to the temple. They have brought it, and I am afraid it is spreading. If so, I shall have to face the unpleasant contingency of parting with you. I don't wish to be inhospitable; but if it gets worse, it will be advisable for you and Mrs. Envile and Daffie to go back to camp. If it follows you there, you will have to run away to the hills. Don't tell Mrs. Envile that it has broken out in the town; it will make her nervous for the child's sake. We may not have any more cases; I trust it may be so," he concluded fervently.

"Is it very infectious?"

"Horribly so! At the beginning of the outbreak it often baffles the doctors, and they are powerless to stop its progress. It moves capriciously, passing over some houses and attacking others without any apparent reason. But don't let us talk of it; let us forget it, Margery!"

Gentle, but with masterful insistence, he played the lover prince to her princess; but later, when they said good-night, he spoke of it again.

"Darling! you mustn't trouble your head over my business. It is not for you to be thinking of the health of the town when I am here to do all that is necessary. That is my work, and the work of men appointed by Government to look after such matters."

"Anything that concerns you will concern me for the

future,' she replied with a decision that she intended to be final. "It is very sweet of you to wish to guard me from trouble; but I'm not taking that sort of life any-way. It is not my pitch—not in my line," she explained. "The men of my country tell their women everything, and it draws them closer together. I guess you have a way to learn about women. Never mind! I'll fix you up properly; and you'll compare favourably with the very best sample of husband to be found in the country."

He did not reply, but let her go. He would take some time for her to understand that it was she who would have to fit in with him, not he into hers. She was a sensible woman, and would come in time. His humanity made him feel for the ones, however, as he sat there smoking his pipe. It was the woman, Margery herself, with the eyes and mouth and sweet form God had given her, that occupied his mind. They were to be his. He was fully aware that these gifts had already roused desire in more than one man's heart. His dreams were interrupted by the voice of a late arrival in the entrance. It was Enville.

"Sorry I couldn't let you know I was coming. I must hurry back to Sirraloor. I heard from Southam to-day. It appears that my Overseer is missing."

"Missing? how's that?"

Enville told him of the safe removal of the devil-stone; of the vanishing of the bridge coolies; of Basil-don's sudden departure from Sirraloor on the following morning, and of his mysterious disappearance. Two days had elapsed and nothing had been heard of him, though the police had been making every inquiry.

"I ought to have come back yesterday, but my letters mis-er me. I was on a long round of inspection with the car, and I only heard the news to-day when I returned. I shall have to go to Sirraloor to-morrow. I can't think what has happened to Basil-don, unless he has followed the contractor in the hope of getting back the coolies to finish the work. It is quite likely that he may have done so. There is only one thing that puzzles me."

"What is that?"

The poor whose duty it is to attend to the vanishes also. Scythians found him at the station doing his job, and it was he who gave the information about the other slaves as prisoners. When Scythians heard he was to be tried, they took him to a native house, where he was held for a few days. Then he was taken to a prison, but he was not there long. He was taken to the prison with him. He had the same fate as the other slaves of the car which he had freed the day before. He came back to the prison now to be found.

"Couldn't the constable give me a ride home?"

"Apparently not. The man seemed to have vanished off the scene before their eyes. Southam couldn't wait; and he drove away, taking the two constables with him. He is sorry now that he did not leave one of them to hunt the peon down; as he expects him on his way home now, he must take care of him."

"What do you think, Cousen?"

"That basilisk's disappearance has been a miracle by which he confounded old sathu on account of his meeting with the devil-stone."

"I suppose Southam has taken up the matter."

"Of course. He is very busy just now. Some one has put him on the track of the man or men who have been spreading these unsettling rumours about the war."

At this moment Josie appeared in a wonderful garment called a robe on, all lace and chiffon

"Ah! I thought I heard your voice, Guy!" she exclaimed.

"K. ght you are! I found I could get into Madura to-night so I came. The attraction of Wairadalle's comfortable house wa too great to be resisted. Travellers' bungalows are the very deuce for discomfort."

"That's all right!" said Josie, with relief. "I was afraid something was the matter."

True to their principles, they told her nothing of their anxiety concerning Basdon.

"Will you have anything to eat?" asked Warredale, mindful of his duty as host.

"No, thanks ; I dined before I left."

"Then come along," said Josie. "I've some news for you! Good-night again, Mr. Warradaile;" and she glanced at him with a smile that warned him of the purport of her promised news.

## CHAPTER XVIII

AFTER the fruitless search of the house and the failure to find the D.P.W. peon, the Superintendent of Police, the Inspector and the two constables drove off. Two strange incidents occurred almost at once.

The toddy-drawers who had been busy with their pots and climbing apparatus ceased working among the palms and gathered together. Screened by the palm trunks they watched the dreaded officers of the law till they were safely out of sight. Then forsaking their work they walked to a spot where some rice straw was spread upon the ground. They turned it over as if to dry it; and having satisfied themselves that it was arranged to their liking, they strolled towards the house. A neglected midday meal was awaiting them and they were more than ready for it.

The second incident was the sudden animation of a clod of earth. It was not fifty yards from the spot where the car had stood. A straggling cactus spread its spined limbs near it. Southam's eye must have passed over the spot several times as he searched the landscape just before driving away. Had he been attracted by the shapeless lump, he would have taken it for the remains of an old ant-heap or a ridge of dried mud thrown up by the flow of the last monsoon flood.

The lump rose slowly with as little movement as possible and developed into the dark-skinned peon. He was once more to all appearances the bare unclothed native who had run with his master's suit-case to the railway station.

Quickly and with the caution of an animal he moved towards the road without rising. Having reached the metalled way he proceeded to rub himself with dust until the glossy brown-black of his well-kept skin had

lost its burnish. The dark mahogany tint was obliterated ; and he was to all intents and purposes a travel-stained ascetic under a vow to abstain from all luxuries of the toilet until his pilgrimage was ended.

His next care was to dispose of his bundle which he had dragged behind him to the road. No beggar would be possessed of as much property in clothes as the bundle represented. Hobbling along the road with a well-simulated limp for a short distance, he sat down as if to rest. Not a soul was in sight ; yet he felt convinced that eyes were watching for passers-by from the building through some cranny or peephole in that blank mud wall. Every yard of the road in its full length was probably commanded by a similar point of vantage, indistinguishable from without, but known to the inmates. After a short time he rose to his feet and hobbled on another length which brought him abreast of a growth of prickly pear near the road. The patch was between him and the house.

Once more he squatted on his hams and moved in that position till he reached the bit of scrub, keeping it always between himself and the house. Like a dog with a bone he scratched at the dry earth by the side of the cactus till he had made a shallow hole. He opened his bundle and took out his uniform, which he folded flat and covered with earth and the rubbish of the surface. He then tied up his bundle as tightly as possible, making it more in keeping with the needs of a professional beggar and ascetic.

His manoeuvres had brought him nearer to the grove of palmyras where the toddy-drawers had been busy, and not far from the spread of rice straw. A cloud of dust in the distance told of the approach of some wheeled vehicle. With infinite care he crept in between the thorny arms of the cactus, avoiding the cruel spines, sharper than the finest needle manufactured by man ; and once more the human being disappeared. Only a dull ridge of earth was visible lying motionless in the deep midday shadow of the prickly pear.

The cart was drawn by a trotting bullock. Nellappa recognized it as the conveyance hired to take his master

to the station. It was empty. The bullock trotted at a steady pace as if it had had a rest. On its approach a man wearing a dark coat, blue turban and Muhammadan trousers issued from the house and hurried across the open ground towards the road. He reached it as the cart came up. The driver seemed to expect his fare, for he pulled up and the man entered the vehicle and was driven off at once. Nellappa noticed that the curtain at the back was so arranged as to screen the passenger entirely. He rose to a sitting position and once more his slow brain took upon itself the task of thinking. The Superintendent of Police must have had some good reason for his search at that particular spot. The picking up of a fare from the house showed that the driver was known to the occupants. The driver could not be ignorant of the fate of his master. Between them all they must not only be aware of what had happened, but also be responsible for his disappearance. Having come to this conclusion Nellappa determined to follow the footsteps of every man, woman or child who remained in or near the house. Those who left, like the Muhammadan, he did not trouble about; his master was too large and cumbersome to be carried away in a small parcel secreted on the person.

The midday sun was hot. The peon had had no chance of making a meal before he was whirled away on the search. He was conscious of thirst and hunger. The thought that a savoury curry was in process of being devoured by the men he had seen did not lessen the pangs. The toddy-drawers were undoubtedly eating their fill. Presently they would lie down on their grass mats and sleep for forty minutes. How was he to get a drink of water during their siesta? There was a well from which water was raised for the cattle. He dared not approach it, far less touch it; for he was a pariah, and his touch would mean pollution. The river? It was too far off. He must not lose sight of the house if he wished to find his master. With the resignation of the oriental who recognizes the inevitable, he prepared to endure his fast.

Carefully preserving his character of a sickly



mendicant he once more hobbled to the side of the road and seated himself on the dry vegetation at its edge. A second cloud of dust announced the approach of the country cart. It was drawn by two bullocks whose pace did not exceed two miles an hour.

As the cart passed he held out his tin pot and in the ascetic's tone pleaded for water. The driver, a heathen, dared not neglect the opportunity of ~~merit~~ <sup>acquiring</sup> merit. He had his water jar with him. He would soon arrive at the station where he could obtain a fresh supply. It was easy to comply with the beggar's request as far as water was concerned.

The bullocks were stopped, and the cartman without comment descended from his perch at the base of the pole. He unhitched a water jar that was slung inside the arched cover of the cart and filled the tin pot. Nallappa drank thirstily, pouring the water down his throat without touching the rim of the mug with his lips; then he held out the mug for a second supply which was willingly given. The jar was emptied, and the beggar placed the brimming tin pot carefully on the ground.

Then he struck his bare body with the palm of his hand to indicate emptiness and hunger after the fashion of his kind. The cartman comprehended the action. It was not with any prompting of pity for a starving human being that he gave the supplicant the remains of his midday dinner; but in the full belief that he was acquiring sufficient merit to cover his systematic pilfering from the loads he carried to and from the station, and his various other little peccadilloes in the way of slackness in caste observances when he was on the road. The food bestowed was not exactly appetising from a European point of view—half a cold dumpling of millet flour and a bunch of bananas,—but it was sufficient to stave off hunger.

The beggar murmured the conventional words of gratification as he took the food; the cartman shouted at his patient cattle and moved slowly on his way. Nallappa ate the dumpling and a couple of bananas, but reserved the rest of the fruit.

glanced at his shadow as he sat there, judging length the hour of the day. It was the moment human and animal life having satisfied hunger and slumbered. The birds became dormant, and their activities among the insects. The dark-buffaloes stood chewing the cud in the scanty of the palmyras. The children inside the court-~~became~~ silent with drowsiness; and the men ~~ed themselves~~ under the inner verandah. Last the old grandmother, who had been busy in the cleaning the pots and pans, succumbed to the ~~ce~~ of the heat and took her share of the black holiday.

Nellappa rose, and with halting steps wandered over on ground away from the road, as if in search of a spot to lie down and sleep. He carried his ~~and~~ and his pot of water and moved aimlessly across on ground towards the grove of palms. Arrived an observer might have supposed from his actions was difficult to please in the choice of a lair for ~~ta~~. The straw attracted his attention, and thither t with the same painful limping step.

sooner had he reached the spot than his bearing changed. The weak limping beggar a strong able man, swift and furtive in his ~~ents~~.

place where the straw was laid out was partially d from the buildings by the ubiquitous prickly Nellappa tossed the straw aside in feverish haste, ght met his eyes that drew from him an exclama-  
horror.

atched out, as if crucified, Basildon's unconscious as pinned to the ground with tent-pegs and cord. was in his mouth. His face was exposed to the re of the sun, except for the thin covering of which had mercifully protected him sufficiently his life so far.

peon removed the gag and then loosened the nd released his limbs. He drew the stiffened lown to the side of the prostrate man and ed his scorched face with water. Lifting his

head, he poured a few drops down Basildon's throat. Consciousness slowly returned, and the Overseer opened his eyes.

"Where am I? What are you doing? Let me go, I say!" and he began to struggle.

"Quiet, master; please stay quiet till I have loosened all the ropes."

During the process of releasing him, Nellappa drew the straw over his body, lest the gleam of the sun on the white coat of his master should attract attention. At last the Englishman was free, but he was not unhurt. It was evident that he had had a severe struggle with his captors. Fortunately no limb had been broken; but he was bruised and sore all over his body, and stiff with his cruel crucifixion. In addition, he was in a murderous mood, and would have gone then and there in search of his assailants, unarmed and helpless as he was. Nellappa pushed him back with small ceremony and covered him over, imploring him in a whisper to lie quiet as he valued their lives. He himself burrowed under the straw. Gripping his master's arm, the two men remained flat and motionless with the cunning of animals that are hunted.

The peon had caught sight of a couple of small boys who had issued from the door in the mud wall. They had been driven out by their elders to look after the buffaloes and take them down to the river. They shouted to the sleepy beasts and moved in the direction of the river bed. The awkward beasts needed no driving. They followed their keepers willingly enough to the spot where boys as well as buffaloes intended to spend the afternoon wallowing in the limpid pools among the pampas grass and reeds.

As soon as they were out of sight, Nellappa rose and glanced round with a sigh of relief. The tension had been great. The Englishman was not yet safe. Discovery must have meant either a desperate fight against men armed with loaded sticks, or a cruel death in some hidden recess of that walled-in building. Bodies buried in remote parts of the wild expanse of country that surrounded the house would never be discovered,

let the police search as they would, unless one of the culprits turned informer.

"We must move, sir, and be quick about it. The men will be out again soon."

"Let them come," and he cursed them root and branch. "Can't you find me a knife?"

"No time, sir. Take off your white suit and let me lay it out. They will come out soon and look at you. If they see the clothes under the straw they will think you are still there. Quick, sir! Quick!"

Basildon did as he was told, too dazed to oppose. In shirt and drawers Nellappa led him, as fast as the stiffened limbs would allow, to the place where he had buried his peon's uniform.

In less than ten minutes there hobbled along the bent figure of a wandering mendicant and a sturdy peon. Both men were travelled-stained and very dusty. The peon wore a pair of boots that might have been given to him by his master; the beggar was barefooted. Over the turban of the peon a red handkerchief was thrown as a protection from the heat of the sun. It shaded his face, which was covered with dust, and hid his features.

The pair were not out of sight when two of the toddy-drawers came through the door and sauntered with leisurely steps towards the straw. The watchful Nellappa noted their movements and his breath quickened in his anxiety. Would they go and look at their victim? Would they discover his flight?

"Master, walk a little faster!" he said, putting his hand under Basildon's elbow.

"I can't, Nellappa! I can't! I'm doing my best. The bananas were a poor tiffin—better than nothing; but I feel faint for want of food."

His faintness was due to exposure rather than hunger. The cruel rays of the tropical sun were beginning to do their work. They were following a footpath, a short cut across that arid scorched expanse that led to the station. Once arrived at the travellers' bungalow Nellappa had no fear of further assault; but until they were within hail of help they were not safe.

They reached a slight depression in the soil, a spot where pools of water collected in the rains. The path in dry weather ran across it; in wet it circled round it. Patches of pampas grass marked the bed of the pool. They were almost out of sight of the house when they heard shouts in the distance.

"Quick! quick! into the grass, sir!" cried Nellappa.

Among the dry swaying stems with their frayed ribbons of foliage and ragged pennons of blossoms crept the peon and the Overseer. Cunningly Nellappa arranged the miniature forest around them until they were completely hidden. The men searched far and wide with a diligence born of desperation. The escape of the Englishman would mean punishment; on no account must he be allowed to get away alive.

Their first intention was to make it appear that he had died a natural death from exposure, and they counted on receiving a reward for bringing his body in. It would have been easy to furnish witnesses to prove that he had been drinking; that he had insisted on leaving the cart; that he had wandered and lost his way; that he had been seen staggering helplessly towards the spot where they found him dead. The marks on his body might easily be accounted for by the falls of a man who had taken too much.

It was all diabolically planned and would have been carried out in every detail had it not been frustrated by the unaccountable fact that their victim had escaped. Now it meant murder with violence and nothing less. The body would have to be hidden and they would get no reward.

They ascribed his release to the enormous strength with which Englishmen were endowed. The sun, instead of killing him as it would have treated a Eurasian or native, had roused his latent powers, and he had managed to free himself; but he was unarmed and, if they could only find him, they might rely on their lathees for the rest.

The sun went down into a purple mist behind the distant ghats. The short Indian twilight was soon over,

and the country was hidden in its mantle of darkness. The children returned with the cattle, and a couple of women belonging to the household came in from an errand on which they had been sent to get them out of the way. Their shrill voices sounded from the courtyard until the evening meal had been served. It was later than usual, for the men had not yet returned. After waiting for more than an hour, the old woman served out the curry and rice to the rest of the family. They took their food, and after sitting in whispered conclave as to the reason of the absence of the men, they rolled themselves in their sheets and slept. It was not until eleven o'clock that the household settled down. Occasionally the old woman opened the door to listen and peered into the darkness.

"I told them how it would be! The polliss have caught them," she mumbled as she went back to her mat.

About midnight Nellappa ventured to rise from his lair. He touched the figure by his side.

"Sir! sir! it is safe now to move. We must go at once. Get up, sir!"

Basildon began to mutter rapidly to himself.

"Are the bridge coolies here? Let them get on with their work, contractor. We have waited too long as it is. Where is that cursed old sadhu and his devil-stone? What are all these dancing women doing here?"

"Sir, we are alone. There are no coolies and no dancing women here. Come to the station bungalow, sir. It is too late to catch the night mail. I heard it go by half an hour ago; but we can stay at the bungalow, and master can get some food."

Nellappa tried to help Basildon to his feet but he was unwilling to rise.

"Why should we move? this is good enough for me, and the devil-stone and the amma too, if she likes to come," babbled the Overseer in his delirium.

Nellappa started back with horror. Although he was a Christian, he firmly believed in the heathen devils. This was the result of meddling with the devil-stone.

The amma had tried to kill him by the hands of the toddy-drawers who were doubtless in the pay of the sadhu. Having failed, the demoness had come to him in the hours of darkness, and she would deliver him over to the men who had been engaged to kill him.

Basildon continued to mutter to himself. Nellappa, more terrified of the powers of darkness in the spiritual world than of human wickedness, carried his bundle and fled.

## CHAPTER XIX

MARGERY and Warradaile were sitting on the verandah of his smoking room. The long woody trails of the orange-flowered bignonia screened them with its dark thick foliage from the morning sun. The air was filled with the sweet meadowy scent of the modest cowslip creeper, that hid its greenish yellow blossoms under the shade of the stronger bignonia.

A pair of bulbuls were chattering unheeded over a newly-built nest in the foliage. It was disturbing to their orderly little lives to have strangers so near their domicile, which they were making for the coming family. Out in the sunlight a flycatcher was fluttering among the leaves of a tree, piping its quaint song in pure pleasure at the plentifulness of food.

After the morning ramble through the garden Warradaile had enticed Margery to a retired spot that was sacred to himself, and remote from visitors as well as garden coolies and servants.

"Margery, I am not a very patient person, I am afraid," he remarked as he drew his chair nearer to the one she occupied.

"I haven't noticed any barbaric figuring in your conduct to show that you are impatient," she replied with a laugh. She had no intention of allowing him to take the circumstances of their engagement too seriously.

"I want to be married," he said with quiet directness that admitted of no trifling. "Why should you and I wait? We have no excuse on the score of age as we are both old enough to know our own minds. Don't you agree with me?" he added, as she did not immediately reply.



"Yes ; that's so," she responded slowly

"May I tell you my plans ?" he asked with a touch of eagerness he could not hide.

"By all means do so. I hope——" she checked herself. She was going to express a hope that they would fit in with hers, but looking into that quiet masterful face wearing its smile of possession, she refrained. It was not fear that kept her silent, but the innate disinclination of her good nature to say anything that might ruffle or disturb his happiness.

"You would like to see something of the north of India, wouldn't you ? I should enjoy it enormously. It is a trip that I have vaguely promised myself for some years past. I have never been able to find the time for it. Now there is a prospect of making it under the happiest conditions."

"It would be very nice," she answered but without much enthusiasm. Her mind was dwelling upon another matter. She was thinking how business and pleasure might possibly be combined.

"We might start in November and take six or seven weeks—two months' privilege leave it would mean for me—and get back here in time for the Christmas festivities. What do you say to that arrangement ? it seems to me quite attractive."

"To tell you the truth, I hadn't thought of our pulling it off so soon. Let me see ; that would be in about six weeks' time," she replied, startled at the way the future was being mapped out for her.

"You don't mind, do you ?" he answered complacently, and in entire ignorance that he was encroaching upon her independence. "As I said just now, there is nothing to wait for. It will be far pleasanter for you—if you want to see India—to have a companion ; and as for me, Margery, I can't tell you how I feel about it ! Nothing like this has ever come into my prosaic well-ordered life before."

He laid his hand upon hers and the look in his eyes brought the blood to her cheek.

"Well ! if that's your aim," she replied, after a slight pause, "I must be hustling a bit. I must get down to

"I shall without further delay ; and perhaps run up from there to Bangalore. Can we take in Bombay and Calcutta when we fix up our journey ?"

"Yes ; it would be possible ; but you won't find either of these towns so interesting as Lahore, Benares, Cawnpore or Lucknow."

"It isn't the sight-seeing I'm after ; it's business. I'll go out to-morrow to Madras and start right in."

"You will find the shops at Madras well supplied to supply you with all you will want for the present. It won't be necessary to go to Bangalore. Don't buy big odds. Next hot weather I shall get long leave and we will go home to England."

"I wasn't thinking of my shopping. I've clothes enough to last me for a year. I'm on another stunt altogether. I mustn't forget the fruit-canning and what I came to this country for. I think I've managed it to you. I've got to establish connections that will insure the turn-over. I'll do Madras and Bangalore before we join forces. Afterwards I can do Calcutta and Bombay on our trip, and if there's any likelihood of a market for my goods in those other towns you mentioned, I'll see that I get a grip of it somehow."

Varradale listened speechless. He had completely forgotten the fruit-canning business. The idea that his wedding trip was to be utilized for a vigorous campaign of commercial travelling was unthinkable. The contemplation of his *fiancee* seeking the custom of the Madras firms as Miss Longford was bad enough ; but the thought of her doing such a thing as his bride and bearing his name was appalling. Was it possible that she could be ignorant of how commercial travelling was regarded by people of his class ?

"I'm afraid that—what you propose—is impossible," he managed to say.

"Not at all," she replied, still unseeing. "You leave it all to me, and I'll work it so that it doesn't touch you. It's not your pitch in the very least."

How he wished she could modify her colloquialisms ! They jarred on his nerves horribly whenever the conversation became serious. His "pitch" ! She might have

been talking about a pavement artist, or a street costermonger! He dared not trust himself to make any reply. Assuming that his silence was consent, she continued—

"Yes; that's what I had better do. I'll go off by the mail to-morrow evening, stop a couple of days in Madras, and get through with the business. Then I'll go straight on to Bangalore and see Jones and Co. and Brown and Co., and that Muhammadan firm that's doing a big business with the Kolar Gold Fields——"

How had she learned all these details about the big retail shops of a place she had never seen?

"Margery!" he jerked out at last, interrupting her flow of words. My darling girl! Believe me, what you propose is impossible!"

"Impossible! why?" she rejoined, staring at him in blank astonishment.

"As my future wife, such a course as you propose is impossible; more than that, it would be intolerable! intolerable!"

He laid such stress upon the last word, which he repeated, that she looked up at him with sudden astonishment.

"I don't think I quite get you," she said, using another American expression that did not serve to allay his irritation.

"It is not the custom for ladies to—to——" he stopped, unable to proceed. The contemplation of himself as the husband of an ardent lady "drummer" was too appalling for words. His personal pride rose up in arms at the mere thought of it. The consternation written on his face made her laugh; but though she was amused for the moment, she could not help feeling sorry for him in his evident distress.

"You Englishmen shy at commerce and trade like a raw colt at the latest thing in automobiles. Haven't you arrived at the fact that it is the breath of life to an American from the West? I was born in the canning business, brought up in it from a tiny kiddie; and it has me right in its grip. Since Dad died, I've made good in the trade and extended the business. Real

proud of me he'd be, if he could see how I stand right now, I tell you!"

"But as my wife, Margery——" Warradaile began, in vain protest.

"As your wife, I'll do my darndest, as the boys say, to please you and make you happy. If you can't reconcile yourself to the canning, maybe before long I'll dispose of the business, sorry as I shall be to cut myself adrift from an honest trade, that has done me well ever since I've had my hand on it. For that very reason——turning it into a company—it is the more important that I should work it up for all it's worth. When I've got through with my booming, I may reckon to retire from it; but not till then."

He was not satisfied; he wanted her to separate herself from it at once, and saw no advantage in hanging on to obtain a few thousands more.

"Can't you turn it into a company at once, and get clear of the whole thing before—before——"

"Before we get married? Of course, it's up to me to do what I like with it, when I like; but you must admit that there's no sense in giving up a fine business all in a hurry. It can be increased by half as much again if I open up these new fields. I must take my time about realizing. I hope to make at least a quarter of a million dollars out of it when I retire. What's the matter with it, that you don't like it? It's all honest and above board; and you can't say that for the half of our firms out West."

"I've nothing to urge against the industry in itself. It's your connection with it that I don't like; your position as manager."

"I'm not manager; I'm boss; and I can tell you this much: I'm terribly well thought of in San Francisco as a boss. There are few who are reckoned slicker where business is concerned than I am."

Margery spoke with some excitement. She was slightly hurt at the entire absence of recognition on the part of her lover of the qualities that made her famous in her native town. The more excited she became, the more she dropped into the colloquialisms of her

childhood, when she was to his imitation and annoyance.

A silence fell upon them. Wairadale dared not just hint at to say much lest he should express himself too strongly. Mary was perplexed at his attitude, but she could not help which he had always regarded as her fault and his fault. She had been brought up by her father to look upon the making of money as the main object in life and the building up of a fortune in any other way as an accomplishment that left nothing more to desire.

"As my wife you will have no time no opportunity —" began Wairadale.

"Don't say more," she replied with a confidence that did not reassure him. "I should be a daft idiot to let this business slip out of my hands and drift away into nothing."

"As a company it wouldn't melt away."

"That's so, perhaps, but at the same time it would never increase and develop as it would in private hands. Business like fruit-canning needs a master mind, with any other it is never off it from the time the cans come on with it, but to the labelling of the tins and placing them on the market."

"Is there any necessity to increase the business? Surely you would realize enough capital if you sold out to-morrow. You don't want the money. I am well off, and quite able to supply you with all the pocket-money you will need —"

"There you make a mistake. It would be no pleasure to me to spend other people's money. I'll allow that you might dress me and house me, and give me a new automobile when the old machine creaks up, but those are not the sum total of my needs," she said, thinking of the painter's wife and other recipients of help in time of necessity.

"What are your needs?" he asked. "Do you mean your charities and benevolences outside your own wants? I can promise to enable you to carry out all your present liabilities. In fact you would probably be able to do everything you wish out of the income arising

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...the day you have in a day to make. Mrs. ... the little bit that he ... to ... , and you ... putting in another ... day ... you will stay, and you ... live ... the ... new day. During ... the ... the ... business ... to ...

Since, in the first case, we came to the time, but in a way that the fourth letter was a fiction then respectively the third to be reckoned with and the they were both accustomed to oppose

standing stood in her room, a precious room, oblivious of the necessity of removing her hat and smoothing her hair. A expression of simplicity was shewn in her face. Her eyes, tinged with an old strain, "It is wise to be on with the olive before you are on with the rose." The old love in this case was the arm of Longford. It had twined itself very closely round her heart, strings and many of her dearest memories were bound up in it. It belonged to the old Dad, he had loved so well. To sever her connection with it would be to cut herself adrift from that portion of her life altogether.

Could she do this and find consolation and—what was more—compensation in the new world she was to enter with Warradaile? It had seemed easy in the first flush of the changed conditions to be true to both—the new and the old; to continue, partly by proxy through the distrusted manager, and partly by personal supervision at intervals, the fruit-canning business; and at the same time to fulfil all her duties, social as well as wifely, to her husband.

There was another reason for her mental disturbance. It lay in the fact that she and Warradaile had differed—not lightly but fundamentally. They had been sufficiently self-possessed not to succumb to the temptation of allowing their difference of opinion to degenerate into a vulgar squabble or wordy wrangle. It might have ended thus with a girl and a boy, or with people less well-bred and self-controlled. Each felt strongly on the subject, and each was strongly wedded to his and her opinion.

Warradaile was accustomed to have his way. He was deliberate in forming his judgment; and when it was formed he was convinced that it was correct and needed no modification.

Margery was equally self-assured. Since the death of her father she had experienced no authoritative control, and she had learned to rely on herself. Her natural shrewdness saved her from any bad mistakes; and if she erred now and then, she usually found some excuse for the error of her judgment.

The more she considered the subject that had been under discussion that morning, the less she felt inclined to yield. Warradaile might be fully informed in all matters concerning India and its government, but in business affairs he was admittedly ignorant; and any opinion he might hold regarding a Western trade, such as she was engaged in, was valueless. How could it be otherwise?

The thought intruded itself that he had no right to attempt to influence her, nor try to superimpose his will upon hers. She had made no such demand upon him. On the contrary, she had permitted him without

protest to settle off-hand the vital details of her marriage and her honeymoon, because they were his affairs as well as hers; but where the affair was hers and hers alone, there was no necessity for her to submit.

The relinquishment of a paying concern, a business that had nothing whatever to do with him, with all the excitement of the successful working of it, was too much for any man to expect of her. Warradaile must discover for himself that she was not a child; that the women of the West, whether married or single, were separate units, leading their own lives without losing their independence.

It might be a difficult lesson for him to learn; but it must be learned, if the two were to enjoy the broad happiness which men and women of her own world expected in the present day. With this in her mind she entered the breakfast-room unruffled and serene, ready to fit herself in to his mood and study his pleasure, as far as it could be done without an infringement of her liberty.

Warradaile had also had a little time for rumination. He had come to the conclusion that, being a sensible woman, Margery herself would soon be brought to see the inappropriateness of pursuing a course opposed to her husband's wishes. Mrs. Enville would help by placing before her the disadvantages of allowing any distraction or multiplicity of duties to come between them. The conduct of a trading business would be incompatible with their position in India, and it would also be quite unnecessary financially.

By the time he joined his guests he, too, was in a more even frame of mind, content to let the subject under contention alone, and disposed to think only of how the hours might best be spent.

"I shall be home early to-day. It is a native holiday," he said, as he rose from his seat at the breakfast-table.

"We might have a nice drive," suggested Josie.

"I was thinking of that. Would you like to go out to the camp?"

"It is rather far for Daffie, and we should be late in returning," replied Josie.



"Oh, mummie! do let us go to the camp! I want to see if the amma has carried back her devil-stone. Yann says that she has. I heard her telling the butler so."

"No, dear; the camp is too far. Run and fetch your fairy book. I am going to read that lovely story of the soldier and the dogs with eyes as big as saucers."

The child went off obediently to her mother's request.

"What's that about the devil-stone?" asked Warradaile, as he took his sun topee from the attendant servant preparatory to getting into the car.

"Guy writes that the stone is back again in its old position under the neem tree. The villagers say that the amma carried it back herself. He is dreadfully worried. There is no hope of getting the work finished now before the floods come down; and of course he has to give a reason that will satisfy Government for the delay."

"I don't envy him there," said Warradaile.

"I suppose it is the doing of that disagreeable old grafter with the queer eyes; the mahunt I think I heard him called," observed Margery.

"He has disappeared altogether; vanished mysteriously," remarked Warradaile.

"Is there any reason for his disappearance?" asked Margery.

"He is wanted by the police. Southam was out after him that day Overseer Basildon couldn't be found. The police have a suspicion that the mahunt is the man who has been spreading these mischievous and false reports. He has been paid, of course. By-the-bye, does your husband say anything about Basildon, and whether he has been found?"

"He doesn't mention his name."

"Probably he went after the defaulting coolies and will return with the gang in a day or two. I hope he will have no scruples about the stone, but will pitch it into the river. The Overseer has been far too kind and considerate in dealing with the villagers, and he gets no thanks for his pains," said Warradaile as he departed to the kutcherry.

## CHAPTER XX

THE rapid drive through the afternoon air completed the healing of the breach between Margery and Warradaile. She had schooled herself into a less independent frame of mind, and was prepared to meet him half-way on the question of disposing of the canning business. He would consent definitely to turn it into a Company within reasonable time. If he preferred to be dissociated from it altogether, she would go to California alone from England. He might remain with friends and relatives to shoot and fish in Scotland, and she would undertake to be quit of it personally by the time she returned.

It was a great concession. She wondered if he would appreciate and understand how much she was giving up for his sake. She did not sacrifice herself grudgingly; her generous nature rejoiced in the giving of her best; but she was shrewd enough to desire a recognition of her gift.

Possibly it added to Warradaile's attraction in her eyes that he should require some sacrifice at her hands. He would not have wished to find him a complacent puppet, whose yea and nay was carefully attuned to hers. She liked him to be autocratic; but there was a limit. He should know where to draw the line, and be able to exercise discrimination in his interference.

As for money, she would have sufficient to supply her private purse, if she allowed time for an advantageous deal and was not hurried. She had the satisfaction of knowing that she and her father had made every dollar of her fortune. It would always be hers to do as she liked with, and dispense as she chose. She was under no necessity to account for a cent of it.

As for the pleasure she had obtained from the

business, she put it aside and resolutely refused to give it a thought. She dared not contemplate her life without it; her courage might have given way. Now and then the fact obtruded itself that it meant severing all the old ties, relinquishing all the old joys; even the old friends connected with the trade must be given up. There would be no more pleasant little trips to fruit farms to look at hypothecated crops; no more long-distance journeys to keep alive the custom with the shippers; no more need to study the sugar market or the question of labour. It would all be a closed book henceforth, and forbidden ground; Margery would be making a great sacrifice, for she was a born trader to her finger tips.

Warradaile was conscious of an easier tone in the mental atmosphere as she sat by his side. For all his autocracy he was a good fellow at heart, naturally disposed to humour women and children and to pet every animal that crossed his path. He was also a good master to his servants; and in the kutcherry he represented to his official staff and the people he governed the soul of justice.

Very little was said on the way. The car glided along a smooth road running towards the west. The blue mountains with masses of white cloud hanging high above them loomed more clearly out of the haze of heat as the car lessened the miles. Where the sun caught the jungle-crowned heads of the spurs, the outline of the forest giants could be distinguished with an aureole of reflected light on the glistening foliage. As the sun sank the shadows drew together in broad masses of purple and obliterated all detail except the noble outline.

"How monotonous, and yet how fascinating the scenery is," remarked Margery, as Warradaile stopped and turned the car in accordance with Josie's wish to be home before dark for her little daughter's sake. "Does the landscape never change?"

"It would change into marvellous beauty if I drove on into the hills. The Cumbum valley, which is due west of us, is one of the most lovely spots in the Western Ghats."

"I should just love to see it."

"So you shall—by-and-bye. There are lots of expeditions you and I can do when we are able to dispense with our chaperone. What drives we will have, Margery! I must get you a tent; and a good horse as well. The car has its limitations. You can ride, of course?"

"Rather! The Californian woman isn't born who can't cross a horse. She knows the animal in and out, as every Englishman knows his sporting dog. Father saw to it that nothing was omitted in my bringing up. He was not much on style and parlour manners; but when it came to practical training, he was a pretty right old dad for a girl to have."

They reached the town of Madura before the sun had touched the horizon. The traffic in the road made it necessary to slow down.

As they passed some small bungalows, mostly occupied by domiciled Europeans and Anglo-Indians, the car was stopped by a group of people, natives as well as Anglo-Indians. They had clustered round a woman who was exhibiting every mark of extravagant grief and distress.

"What is the matter? Is it an accident?" asked Josie, in some alarm. Her thoughts flew to the child, and the prevention of undesirable sights that would produce horror in the young mind. As no one replied to her question she summoned up sufficient Tamil to repeat it in the vernacular.

A torrent of speech was at once forthcoming. The woman in the road was Mrs. Carvalho, the wife of the Overseer who had lately been stationed at Sirraloor. She was just recovering from a fainting fit in which she had fallen through grief. Two of her children were lying dead of cholera, and her husband was dying. They turned to Mrs. Carvalho and explained to the poor woman, who was blinded with tears, that Mrs. Enville and her friend, the rich American lady, were in the car with the Collector. They urged upon her the advisability of making an appeal. She came forward, supported by two of her friends, and laid her hand upon the car.

'Madam! Oh my! it is Mrs. Enville! Oh, ma'am, my husband is dying, and the cholera has taken two of my children—Bertie, my eldest boy, and Queenie, my darling baby! Now it has seized my husband! What shall I do? Oh! what shall I do? I have no money, and the man will not make the coffins for my children's bodies unless I give an advance!'

Josie listened in silence, her eyes filled with increasing terror as Mrs. Carvalho told her tale. As soon as it was ended she sprang up, and, leaning over Warradaile, whispered—

"Oh, Mr Warradaile, drive home quickly! I will send the money she wants. You heard, didn't you? It is cholera, and I am terrified for Daffie."

Warradaile was perplexed. It went against the grain to drive away in the face of the poor woman's distressing appeal; but Josie, losing her head altogether, gave him no peace. She reiterated her prayer to be taken away from the infected spot as quickly as possible, breathing it in his ear over his shoulder.

'Stand back, please, Mrs. Carvalho,' he said, not daring to move with the crowd so close to the car. "I have no money with me. I can get it at once if you will let me pass on. You shall have all you want."

Margery had listened without making any remark. In another moment before the car could move she was out of it, and standing on the road.

"Margery! Margery!" shrieked Josie, beside herself with fear. "Come back I pray! I beg you to come back into the car. You don't know what you are doing, what risk you are running in stopping here among these infected people!"

"Margery!" said Warradaile. His voice was not loud, but it contained a new note of intense quiet command. "Get in again, please. We can do no good here, and I want to drive on. The sooner I reach home, the sooner I can send the money to Mrs. Carvalho." In full confidence that his mandate would be obeyed, he turned to the weeping, distracted woman. "Mrs. Carvalho, can you tell me the amount the man asks as an advance?"



back with you. The doctor will see that Carvalho all that he needs." She turned once more to Warradaile. "As you love my little daughter, drive on, take her home at once. Who knows that the crowd may not be taking the cholera now, this very moment from these people? They have come straight to the bedside of the dying man. Oh, it is cruel! wicked!"

She fell back on to the cushions and added her tears and lamentations to Daffie's.

By this time the car was moving forward. Warradaile drove slowly. As the crowd melted away he looked round and called to Margery over his shoulder.

"I will come back for you as soon as I have taken Mrs. Enville home," he said.

"Don't!" cried Margery, in response. "I will walk home. I know the way; and I am not sure how long I shall be here."

The words were sent clearly and sharply after the retreating figure. Once again there had been a conflict of wills; and Margery, to her dismay, as she thought over it, found herself opposed to the arbitrary will of the man she was going to promise to obey. She had acted spontaneously and on the spur of the moment following the dictates of her warm-hearted nature; but he had acted at the promptings of a love that drew him into danger for the beloved one.

A feeling of irritation passed over her. He had no right to make demands of this kind. Did he want her to behave with the folly Josie had exhibited? She was not accustomed to be guarded and herded like a sensitive exotic creature that could not bear the buffeting of daily life. What right had she to be shielded from the sight and touch of misfortune? From her old father she had learned that her duty was to go at once to the assistance of a fellow-creature in distress instead of standing aloof. She was to hold out the helping hand instead of withdrawing her skirts. Warradaile might be right about the necessity of relinquishing the independence; but he was not right in asking her or any other woman to refuse to respond when appealed to for help.

She had no time, however, for the consideration of Warradaile's attitude towards her action. By this time two of Carvalho's daughters, both still in their teens, had joined their mother, and were adding their lamentations to the loud expressions of grief around her.

Margery moved to Mr. Carvalho's side. The companion gave place to her, and the poor woman clutched at the arm of the new friend.

"Oh, madam! You are good to stop like this with a bereaved mother! Oh, my darling children! my beautiful Queenie! my noble Bertie!"

"Come back to your house, Mrs. Carvalho, and try to bear your trouble bravely," said Margery, leading her towards a small bungalow where a group of frightened women and children hung about the gateway, "I will gladly let you have what money you want. I have some with me, so there is no need to wait. If the man is here you can give him the advance at once."

"You are indeed good! My daughters will look upon you as a mother and a sister. It will lighten my grief if I can think the dear ones will have a decent and suitable burial."

"How much do you want?" asked Margery, as they approached the bungalow.

"Would you think twenty-five rupees too much, dear, kind lady, to lend a poor woman in the greatest distress?"

"I will give you fifty with pleasure," responded Margery, instantly. "Will notes do? If so, here they are."

She opened the little bag that hung upon her arm and took out five ten-rupee notes. Mrs. Carvalho and her daughters ceased crying in sheer astonishment. Plunged up to the hilt in debt their credit did not amount to five rupees. The sum offered by Margery was beyond their most ardent expectation. It was dazzling. It would pay for the verandah-made mourning as well as the funeral. And as it was offered so readily, they might safely reckon on getting another twenty-five rupees out of their benefactress, nominally as a loan, if not as a free gift. Mr. Warradaile would



be good for another twenty-five or thirty rupees ; and then there was Mr. Enville. He had the reputation of being a liberal gentleman where his subordinates were concerned.

The hand of the Overseer's wife closed over the notes with a gasp of relief. A sudden flow of exuberant thanks followed. Margery tried in vain to check it, for it was embarrassing.

"Never mind about thanking me," she said. "Let me see your husband, and if there is anything that I can do for him in the way of sending him broth or wine it shall be done."

"Will you come and see him?" asked Mrs. Carvalho. "You are not afraid?"

"Not I! If you think he would like it of course I will go in and speak to him. It may cheer him up to think that we are doing everything we know to help him to get well."

"How good you are! How kind!" said mother and daughters in a breath. "The good God has remembered us in our trouble."

## CHAPTER XXI

MARGERY led the way to the bungalow. The entrance was screened by a bamboo blind that hung before it. As she mounted the steps to the verandah the blind was pushed aside and Basildon stood before her barring the way.

She gazed at him in astonishment. It was not the Basildon she had known on board ship, nor the man who befriended her at the travellers' bungalow. It was a gaunt, haggard figure, and the face belonged to one who had suffered. Cheeks and temples were blistered and discoloured by exposure to the sun. The eyes had a sinister expression, not far removed from murder. The hand that held the blind aside trembled, even though it clutched the split bamboo with a grip that would have squeezed the life out of it had it been a living creature. He did not speak, but his eyes rested on her with a questioning gaze that compelled her to explain her presence there.

"I have come to see Mr. Carvalho. I hear he is ill; and I want to know if I can do anything for him; if so I'm ready to do it right now."

"You can do nothing. He is dead."

Mrs. Carvalho and her daughters, who were close behind, heard his words and screamed aloud in their distress. They made no attempt to restrain their grief. To do so was not in accordance with their traditions. It would have seemed callous and inhuman not to have lifted up their voices and wept, so that the world might hear them. Pushing past Basildon they entered the house, and at sight of the still and silent figure upon the bed, they threw themselves on the ground and wailed.

was taken up by the friends of the Carvalhos. They rocked themselves to and fro, and shed their tears of sympathy.

"Come away from this; you have no business here, Miss Longford," said Basildon, roughly.

For answer she attempted to enter the house. It seemed to her that her right place was with the grieving family.

"I must do what I can for those poor things; I can't turn my back upon them in their trouble."

Again she made an attempt to follow the Carvalho family; but he held the blind firmly down behind him, and put out an arm to bar the way.

"You can do no good, unless you like to lend them a small sum of money. I know there is no cash in the house, and their credit is too low to allow of borrowing from any money-lender," he said, his eyes fixed upon her with an expression of heavy determination.

"I have just given Mrs. Carvalho fifty rupees. She shall have more if she wants it. Mr. Basildon, may I ask you to stand aside, please, and allow me to go in."

Margery spoke with more heat than she had used before. This continual opposition was making her impatient. First she had had to endure Warradaile's; and now she was suddenly confronted by the same thing in a man to whom she owed no allegiance whatever. As a friendly acquaintance he might speak, but to order and command! It was not his province, and she had no intention of paying any regard to his wishes.

"You shall not pass in," he said heavily. "And what is more, you will leave this spot at once."

He did not wait for her to carry out his command, but took her by the arm and irresistibly led her from the door. They passed down the path and out into the road. He guided her footsteps towards a by-road that was bordered by a high fence dividing it from the gardens of the bungalows.

"Why do you treat me in this rough manner?" she asked, as soon as her indignation allowed of speech.

"Because I will not permit you to run any unnecessary risks. If you could do any good at all, I should be

the last to stand between you and your intentions ; they are the intentions of an angel. But there is nothing to be done inside that house but what has been done already ; and you are not wanted. So come with me and I will show you a short cut to the Collector's house, which will be better walking for you than the dusty road."

He spoke slowly, retaining his grasp upon her arm and bringing a certain amount of pressure to bear in the direction he wished her to go. He was not using force exactly ; at the same time she was not walking along quite of her own free will. Again she resented this interference with her independence. These Englishmen, she thought, were extraordinarily masterful in their ways when it came to opposing their wills. She stopped, determined not to be coerced.

"Mr. Basildon, I am inclined to go back and see that poor woman again. I have just remembered that her husband being dead she will want more money, now that she has him to bury as well as the children."

"No ; you will not go back," he said, looking down upon her with eyes that in the sunset light seemed to be gazing into her inmost heart. What was it they said ? It was not anger at her obstinacy ; it was more like admiration for her willingness to be of service to her fellow-creatures. She ignored their expression and encouraged herself to be angry and rebellious.

"By what right do you interfere with my movements in this manner?" she asked hotly, making a half turn round in the direction from which she had come. Instantly the strong sinewy fingers that had been gently guiding her steps closed firmly round the soft flesh above her elbows and held her fast. He leaned towards her, and the words came from him as though they burst their bonds and would not be restrained.

"Because I love you ; because you are dearer to me than everything else in the world ; because I fear lest the disease should seize you—you, my guardian angel, the one ray of guiding light in a world that has grown dark and evil since I returned."

She listened silent under a strange spell, a quivering

pity, of which she was totally unaware, shining in her eyes.

"Yes," he continued. "You may believe me or not, as you like. Since you left Sirraloor, since my cursed meddling with Indian devils, I have been in Hell."

"In Hell! What do you mean?" she asked in a low voice. She had often heard men, who had been in trouble, express themselves strongly; and she knew that when they did so it was for no trifle.

"I have been tempted of the devil. If I could, I would have committed murder most willingly on the fiends who tortured me. I could kill them now if they were within my power; but they are not; they have escaped—for the present."

"Tell me all about it. You have been hurt—badly. I can see it in your eyes."

Her soft words full of pity and sympathy sank into the man's scorched spirit like water on a parched land. He caught his breath in a great sobbing sigh, and the hand that had gripped her arm to stop her by physical force dropped to his side. She slipped her hand into his arm. Here was a fellow-creature who needed sympathy. She forgot his strange confession of love—he was ignorant of her relationship to Warradaile—and she thought of him only as a poor, suffering human being, bruised and hurt. The dead lying in the bungalow behind them did not need her. The grieving family divided between their sorrow and the urgent necessity of making arrangements for the triple funeral did not want consolation. All thought of going back passed away, and her whole attention centred on the man whose misery was written in his eyes. Together they walked slowly along the darkening lane that led to the grounds of the Collector's house.

His story was told with broken intervals. He said little of the heathen feast. The details were not fit for her ears. She felt him shudder as he mentioned the devil-dance. Then came the discovery of the flight of the bridge coolies, and his morning's journey to the station which he never reached. The driver of the cart played him false. At the branch roads he turned aside,

after the peon had gone in search of the missing suitcase.

The cart was curtained at the back and screened by the driver in front; and he did not observe that a wrong turning had been taken, until the man stopped near the solitary house standing a little distance from the highway. He began to reproach the driver when three men came up; and taking him at a disadvantage inside the cart, they gagged and bound him.

Carrying him off to the wild broken land near the palmyra grove, they pegged him down in a kind of crucifixion with strong tent-pegs driven into the ground; and there they would have left him to die a slow torturing death from exposure, and perhaps attacks from predatory birds, beasts and insects had he not been rescued.

"How awful; how truly dreadful!" cried Margery, her pitying eyes dwelling on the ravages wrought by the sun upon his skin. "How did you escape?"

"Fortunately the peon's suspicions were raised. He went to the station; and not finding me there, came to the conclusion that there had been foul play of some sort. He searched and was lucky enough to discover me. He did his best to help me to get away; but what with the heat and the exposure I was too weak and delirious to take advantage of his assistance. I had sense enough to remain hidden while it was light. As soon as it was dark I must have become unconscious, for when I came to myself Nellappa had gone. In the meanwhile those devils discovered my escape, and they never rested till they found me. They believed that I was half dead and not likely to recover my senses, which was fortunate for me. They did not think it necessary to tie my hands and feet. After they had carried me a little way I suddenly recovered consciousness. In a moment I was on my feet fighting for dear life."

Basildon stopped abruptly. His eyes burned with fierce anger as he spoke. She looked up at him, understanding something of his feelings.

"You got away from the brutes or you wouldn't be here now," she said.

"The rest is not a nice tale for your ears. When the

peon returned with the old matey from the travellers' bungalow and the station porter, they found me lying between two unconscious men. They helped me to the station, and I came on to Madura."

He did not tell her that in his murderous frenzy he tried to batter the life out of his assailants with a bit of rock which he had found close at hand; nor did he breathe a word of the deep and bitter regret he still felt that he had not killed them outright. The evil spirit of the amma seemed to rest upon him like a cloud, and he became silent. She broke into his moodiness.

"I hope you put the police on their tracks," she said.

"As soon as I reached Madura I communicated with Mr. Southam. He sent at once to arrest them, but of course they had disappeared."

"And then you heard of Mr. Carvalho's illness."

"No; I was told that he had lost two of his children. I went to see him and found him in the throes of the disease himself. Poor fellow! He had no chance from the very beginning: his terror was so great—it was enough to kill him. He died a few minutes before you came up to the door."

Again there was silence. They passed into the grounds of Warradalle's house, and walked in the twilight beneath the beautiful banyan trees for which Madura is famous. Her hand still rested on his arm. Her touch and the nearness of her presence had an extraordinary effect upon his mental condition. She brought peace to his disturbed mind. The evil influence of the amma seemed to melt away, and the deep black desire for revenge gave place to a more reasonable feeling that his assailants could be better punished by the law than by himself. If their blood had been upon his head, could he ever have clasped her hand again?

"You have gone through a terrible experience," said Margery. Then finding that he did not reply she continued. "I once knew a man out in the West whose life was attempted by some one who was jealous of him. He tried hard to forgive him; but he was never quite sure that his forgiveness was honest. At the bottom of his heart there was always a lingering regret that his

knife did not get home. I could understand the feeling. It was only now and then that the revengeful regret came over him. Why did those men try to murder you?"

"Because I informed against the mahunt."

"Ah! I knew that man was a grafter of the most dangerous kind. It was written in his eyes."

"He himself helped in the attack. When he thought I was securely fastened down to my death, he went off disguised as a Muhammadan. The peon saw him go. The cart that conveyed me there took him away. It was all planned from the very beginning, the laming of my pony, the absence of the syce with the other pony, and the dropping of the luggage in the road to get rid of the peon."

"What was the information that you laid against the mahunt?"

"That he was spreading these false reports about, and inciting the people to rebel against the British authority."

"How did you find it out?"

Basildon smiled grimly.

"I dressed up as a leprous beggar and was present at one of his addresses to the villagers. The wily brute! He thought he could play tricks with me as he did with poor Carvalho by using those devilish eyes of his. I let him think so and played a deeper game than his."

"It is a pity the man wasn't one of the two you punished. It would have served him right if you could have given him a good beating."

"I should have done more than that. I should have——"

His teeth clenched upon the murderous words he would have spoken had he been talking to any one else but herself. She saw the fingers of his right hand close convulsively as though they held the mahunt by the throat. His eyes glittered. She caught their expression and pressed his arm with the hand that lay within it.

"I ought not to have said that; you must forget it."

"Forgive me! If I were always by your side, I should never talk or think wickedly. When I am near you all evil thoughts disappear. Have I offended?" he



asked anxiously, as he withdrew her hand from his arm.

"No; but there is no need for you to come any farther. I am going to send you back from here. We are close to the end of the garden, and I go in by the side verandah. Good-bye, Mr. Basildon. We may not meet again. I am going down to Madras in a few days."

He stared at her. The possibility of never seeing her again threw his disordered mind into sudden and tumultuous confusion.

"Stop! I have something to say that you must hear, even if you go out of my life never to enter it again. You are the only woman I have ever loved. I did not know that I loved you. It came to me on board ship. It has been growing ever since. I know that I must live without you. Such as you are do not mate with men like me. Forgive me, but I feel I must speak—"

She put up her hand to stop the hurried, passionate speech which would not be stayed.

"You must not—you really must not talk like that," she cried.

He would not be stayed, he continued hoarsely—

"A man has a right to tell his love; and you shall know and understand that you are the only woman I have ever loved. I shall love you to my dying day. If I cannot have you I will have none."

The strong, rough words appealed to her. It was the kind of word, the women of her country received from their men.

"Mr. Basildon!" she cried in real distress, more than a little awed. "It is too late! Whatever I might have said, if I had been free, it is too late now."

"(If I could!) I have been a fool to say what was in my heart. Yet I am glad. I never dared to hope that you would marry me. Great heavens! How I love you!"

He caught her to him and he felt his lips on hers for a while, as on the lips that she had no power to resist. He released her quickly and pushed her roughly from him.



## CHAPTER XXII

MARGERV passed through the large central hall on her way to her room and met Josie. Mrs. Enville stepped back from her with a gesture of avoidance.

"You need not be alarmed," said Margery, calmly. She had an inward contempt for her friend's fears.

"But you went into the house," said Mrs. Enville in a voice of mingled protest and injury.

"Indeed, I did not. I heard that the poor man was dead. I could have done nothing if I had gone in."

"You intended running the risk of infection if he had been alive," retorted Josie with some warmth. "It was most inconsiderate, most unkind of you. It would have been a living danger to us all."

"Really, Josie, you overstate the case in your excessive fear for your safety."

"I'm not a bit afraid for myself," rejoined Mrs. Enville, ruffled at the implied accusation of unreasonable nervousness she thought she detected in Margery's words. "It is Daffie I have to think of. You don't smile, but I can assure you that it was entirely on his child's account that I made Mr. Warradaile drive. If it hadn't been for me he would have waited for him. Where is he?"

"I don't know; I haven't seen him."

"He went to meet you; didn't he bring you home?"

"No; I walked back by a path through the garden. I told you I intended to walk."

"Were you alone?" asked Josie with some curiosity.

"No; I found Mr. Basil don at the Carvalhos' house and he came to show me the way."

"Overseer Basildon!" exclaimed Josie in surprise. "Then he has turned up again all right! Did you hear how it was that he disappeared so mysteriously?"

The appearance of Warradaile diverted Josie's attention, and Margery was relieved of the necessity of finding some means of avoiding an answer to her embarrassing question. Mrs. Enville hurried towards him to condole with him for his fruitless search for Margery; but his eyes went beyond her and rested on Margery herself.

"I went to meet you with the car; but somehow we missed," he said.

"It was very good of you. I told you I should walk. I came by a pretty lane and a short cut through the grounds."

"And Overseer Basildon walked with her," added Josie, who was still excited from the events of the evening.

"Basildon? Then he is safe, as I always supposed he would be," said Warradaile, his eyes scanning Margery's face. It bore traces of the emotion she had experienced from the time she first saw Mrs. Carvalho in the road to the moment when Basildon had left her at the edge of the garden.

He had no sort of suspicion that anything had ever passed between Margery and the Overseer except what was warranted by a board-ship acquaintance. Yet he regarded her with a curiosity that was never satisfied whenever Basildon's name was mentioned. Had Margery been British in birth and training, he would not have given Basildon a second thought in connection with her; but, considering her Western upbringing, he wondered sometimes how she had met him, and whether there had been any particular friendship between them. She was the kind of woman a man like Basildon would admire; though he would in all probability never dare to do more than admire. She was less fenced in with social barriers than an Englishwoman; and though far above him in wealth and position, she might have met him on different ground from that on which the Englishwoman stood; and she might have encouraged a friendly intimacy.

Margery remained silent on the subject of Basil's safety. The story of his escape was still fresh in her memory. The low, tense words with which he described his crucifixion scorched her sensitive nerves and made her shudder as she thought of it. Enville filled in the silence and made a demand for Warradaile's attention.

"I must leave you to-morrow and go back to the States. Don't think me ridiculously nervous, please. It is for myself; it is for the child's sake I want to leave said, going over the same ground she had covered talking to Margery. "I dare not keep her here a minute longer than is absolutely necessary. I am sure Guy will say I am right."

"I don't think you need be nervous. There is no communication between those bungalows and the house."

"They are only half a mile away. It isn't our fault, but the servants who disregard all sanitary rules run risks of infection. For all I know that foolish ayah of mine will be at the house this very night and hear all the ghastly details; and perhaps she will see and sec the dead bodies. I wish I could have got Guy to-night."

"I'll take you over the first thing in the morning," Warradaile said kindly. He had little patience, even, with Josie's excessive nervousness.

"Thank you so much. I shall be ready to start at six; not later. I shall pack to-night. You must do the same, Margery; you can't be left behind."

"I suppose not!" responded Margery, finding it an effort to keep contempt out of her voice. "I'll go to bed and dress for dinner. I advise you to do the same; and you, Josie, while you are about it, try to forget this child and her worry. What's the good of going over the bridge to see if you get there?"

"I can't help it. I'm not used to roughing it as you are," replied Mrs. Enville as she went off to her room.

Warradaile had been listening in silence, congratulating himself on Margery's strong, common sense, and he could not but appreciate when it jumped with his

"Come to the smoking-room when you are ready," he said. The fact that he was to lose her immediately had suddenly presented itself. "There is so much to be done, I have to talk about it."

Margery would gladly have accepted the invitation after dinner. Basil don was still in her mind. His words were ringing in her ears and his kiss burned upon her lips. She ought not to have allowed him to go to such a length. It was not quite loyal to Warradale. Yet she could not have helped herself. His emotion and the declaration of his hopeless love came upon her tempestuously, like the cyclonic gales of the country with their ill-regulated gusts; and it was beyond her power to hold him back.

She liked him more the worse for it. The strain of roughness in his action appealed to something in her nature which Warradale failed to reach. Basil don had succeeded in stopping her from entering the isolated dwelling by a simple but rugged determination, which somehow did not offend her sense of independence. She was conscious that she would never have submitted to Warradale in the same manner, even if he had stood at the door and barred the way. She could have passed him by; and he, with his instinctive courtesy, would have hesitated to put out the obstructing arm and say, brutally, "No! you shall not!"

She dressed for dinner and after five minutes' schooling herself into a more even and less critical frame of mind she went to Warradale's sanctum. She had come to the decision that she would bring herself into accord with his wishes, if she could; and she would do all in her power to soothe rather than to irritate him. She fully intended to maintain her liberty of action, and to that he would take no exception, if he found that she was carrying out his wishes in the main. She felt confident that he was generous enough to allow her to do things in her own way as long as the object he desired was accomplished.

At the same time there were certain details in her life at the present moment which were no concern of his; and probably the same thing would occur in the future.

Over these matters he ought to exercise no control. She would act entirely as her judgment dictated. If she chose to ask his advice, he might give it ; but he must not hope for a blind acquiescence on her part.

She entered his room with an undefined hope that he was not going to reproach her, as if she had been guilty of a childish piece of disobedience to his orders. It was with relief amounting almost to gratitude that she heard him say in an ordinary tone from which all annoyance was eliminated—

"Well! What news have you to give of the poor man?"

"He is dead!"

"Did you see him?" He glanced sharply at her as he put the question, wondering with a vague fear if she had actually run any risk of infection.

"No ; I did not go into the house after all ; there was no necessity."

He refrained from expressing the intense satisfaction that he felt at her admission.

"When a man is in the last throes of cholera very little can be done for him. One may be sure that the doctor will see that he is not neglected. The house will be disinfected and precaution will be taken to prevent the spread of infection as far as possible ; but the people are very difficult to manage. By-the-bye, I must send Mrs. Carvalho some money."

He rose to go to his writing-table, but Margery stopped him.

"There is no need to send any. I gave Mrs. Carvalho fifty rupees. I always carry money about with me. I have found it convenient ; although I know it isn't the custom to do so in India. Josie always laughs at me for it."

"You have been very generous. Fifty rupees is a large sum to these people. They are not thrifty, I am sorry to say ; and it will melt away in unnecessary expenditure. The poor woman will be destitute again in a week's time."

"Is that so ? Then how is she going to live ?"

"She will go back to her own people, and we shall

place her children—those who still require education—on the foundation of some charity school. The girls will marry just as their mother did. They will spend every penny of their husband's income; and the same kind of tragedy will be repeated as has just taken place."

"Are they never provident?"

"Very seldom indeed. It is not born in them; and they don't seem able to learn it."

"Then Mrs. Carvalho will want more help?"

"She will be sure to ask for it; and I shall probably give her a sum similar to the sum you have given; but I shall not put the cash in her hands. I shall pay her bills and see that her creditors get it. Enville will be asked to do something, and you are sure to be appealed to again."

"I see," said Margery.

She understood all that he wished to convey. He showed his wisdom in not attempting to dictate how much or how little charity should be dispensed. She was a practical woman of business, and he felt that he might leave it to her natural shrewdness to discover whether she was being imposed upon or not. Enough had been said on the subject, and he turned the conversation.

"What was Basilton doing there?"

"He had called in to express his sympathy at the loss of the children, and he found Carvalho himself laid up with the complaint. It was he whom I came up against at the door of the bungalow. He allowed that the poor man was dead, and gave me to understand pretty straight that I wasn't wanted. I thought of staying on a little time with the distracted woman; but after I had handed her the money, I seemed to feel that I didn't fit in any further and I was best away; so I left."

"And the Overseer showed you the way here?"

Margery did not speak. After what had passed between herself and Basilton, she felt that it would be impossible to discuss him with Warradaile. She did not feel entitled to repeat the tale of his suffering. She was not sure if he intended it to be made public.

Warradaile glanced at her as if he would have asked



a question. How was it that Basildon was able to prevent her from entering the house when his own efforts proved of no effect? Her mind was not exactly an open book like Josie's. There were points of reserve now and then through which he could not penetrate.

He dropped the subject and led the conversation into other channels. The time passed quickly, and the dinner bell rang. They met Mrs. Envile on the way to the dining-room. She was looking anxious and worried. A talk with Yann had brought to light more details of the ravages of the disease, and Josie was feeling distinctly aggrieved at having been kept in ignorance of its appearance in Madura.

"Did you know of cholera having broken out in the town, Mr. Warradaile?" she asked, as they sat down to dinner.

"I had heard of a single sporadic case, and I hoped that there would be no more of it. It is not endemic in Madura at present; and there was every reason to believe that we had isolated this one case and stamped it out."

"Are you aware that half a dozen cases have occurred to-day in the town besides the three in the Carvalho's bungalow?"

"I think you are mistaken," replied Warradaile with a contraction of the brow, the only sign of the annoyance he felt. "They would have been reported to me if it had been so."

"My ayah tells me——" and Josie detailed at length the usual bazaar rumours that spring up without any foundation when a public catastrophe of the kind occurs. "I think you ought to have let me know about it. I should have asked Guy to send the car for me to-day."

Warradaile did his best to assure her that her information was false, but she was not to be convinced. She preferred to believe Yann's fables to his assurance. Margery, as she listened, was sorry for him, and she could not help admiring the way in which he met Josie's unreasonable complaints and nervous forebodings. Her ready sympathy flowed towards the man who was being unjustly blamed. He might with reason have lost his

temper, but he maintained it outwardly and never for an instant forgot to be courteous and polite.

"Say, Josie!" she cried at last, losing her patience. "I'm sick to death of hearing about the cholera. I shall have to go off and soak my head in a minute if you continue gronching. Mr. Warradaile may have made a mistake in not letting you have the news, but anyway you've handed it to him in what you've said. Now let that end it right here. We've got such a lot of other things to talk about."

Josie was silenced at last, and Warradaile gave Margery a grateful glance; but though she made an effort to restore the happy atmosphere that had hitherto prevailed, she failed in her attempt. As soon as dinner was over Josie excused herself on the plea of the necessity of packing, and retired to her room.

"I am sorry Mrs. Enville is upset," remarked Warradaile as he and Margery settled themselves in the verandah.

"She used not to fuss when we were girls together. I don't seem to see the old Josie in this mood of nerves."

"It is the climate; it affects the nervous system and makes the toughest of us jumpy. May I smoke? Now about our own affairs," he continued, as he lighted a cigarette. "Let us come to some definite arrangement about plans while we have the chance. I was fondly hoping that we should have a whole week to consider them, but it is suddenly reduced to a single evening."

"You will run over with the car pretty frequently and see us in camp, I suppose," said Margery, who was conscious of a sudden and unaccountable distaste for all matters connected with her wedding.

"As often as I can; but except on Sundays it is difficult to get away. I have been thinking over your proposed visit to Madras. I know a man down there, a young merchant, an importer of all sorts of goods, who might be useful in—in pushing the—er—the thing you're interested in. Couldn't you offer him a commission and let him act as your agent?"

"I certainly might see him when I go to Madras. I

could tell at once by the look of him if he was likely to fit in. Is he English or American?" she said, giving the Western pronunciation of the word.

"He is English."

Magery's lips were momentarily compressed.

"I have little use for Englishmen in a stunt of that kind. They aren't slick enough."

"Will you give him a trial?"

"Yes; I don't mind promising him that much."

"And if he pleases you and is likely to be successful you can send him round to those northern towns and to Calcutta and Bombay."

"I might," she assented. She had no intention of reopening the question of the business at present. Their last evening together under his roof should be pleasant and peaceful if it rested with her to make it so.

"I was hoping that you would not have to go to Madras at all."

"Oh! I must go!" she said hastily.

"How soon?"

"As soon as possible," she replied. "To-morrow or the next day."

"Write and secure your rooms first at the hotel. The place is filling up with people from the hills; and it won't do to chance finding accommodation."

"Then it will have to be the day after to-morrow."

"If you go as soon as that we shan't see much more of each other; not as much as I hoped," he said regretfully.

An unaccountable sense of relief swept over her. She could not have assigned any reason for it. Suddenly and capriciously she felt that she was tired of everything connected with Madura. The very orderliness of the home, the regularity and smoothness of the life she was leading, had begun to pall upon her. Even Warradale's precise and perfectly correct bearing as host, friend, lover, Government official and master got on her nerves. It was the spirit of the West, stirring and clamouring for the natural unconventional conditions of the old life. She no longer wanted to be a princess. She felt more like a prisoner bound with invisible fetters

in a room where the windows were closed and the air excluded. Warradaile's presence seemed to exert some repressive influence that she had never before felt and against which her spirit rose in rebellion.

She got up from her seat rather earlier than usual to say good-night, pleading that she too must do some packing and not leave everything to the morning. She felt as if she could not endure the gentle touch of his arm about her. To his surprise she cut short the good-night over which he had been wont to linger and drew herself away.

"You are going to drive us to-morrow, are you not? It is most kind of you to spare the time," she said, as he walked with her across the wide hall towards her room.

"Yes; I hope nothing will prevent me from doing so. It will give me a couple of hours longer with you."

The butler, hearing the stir of foot steps, appeared at the doorway leading to the back verandah, according to his custom, to receive the final orders for the next day and to close the house. Warradaile wished him anywhere else at the moment. However there was no help for it. He could not dismiss him; and Margery herself showed no inclination to stay.

"Good-night," she said, offering him her hand.

He leaned forward and kissed her while the old butler discreetly turned his head away, but the presence of the third person had its effect, and the kiss was not what it might have been, to Warradaile's regret.

## CHAPTER XXII

It was still early in the morning when Warradaile turned the car into the tope where the camp was pitched. Enville, who had received no tidings of his wife's sudden return, was just about to start out with the dogs for a walk as far as the D.P.W. bungalow; he had heard that Basildon had come back by train on the previous evening; and Nellappa, who had brought the information, gave him an account of the Overseer's adventures. He wanted to hear the story again from the Overseer's own lips. Enville greeted the party with surprise rather than pleasure.

"What have you come back for, Josie?" he asked his wife.

"Cholera has broken out in Madura and I dare not stop there any longer with Daffie."

"I wish you had written to me before coming here," he said regarding her with some anxiety.

"What's the matter?" asked Warradaile. If any blame was due for her action it was only right that he should bear his share.

"The place is in a ferment over the devil-tree."

He glanced at Josie and then at Margery, wondering if he had said too much. He did not wish to raise their fears. Josie replied at once.

"Ferment or no ferment, I would rather be here than at Madura. I am not afraid of these stupid villagers, who can think only of their devils; but I am of the cholera. I suppose you have a clean bill of health here?" she said with sudden suspicion.

"The health of the village is all right. The headman died soon after the devil-dance; but that was due to apoplexy after the dance. It appeared that he not only took part in it but had been drinking heavily."

"I am relieved to hear what you say about the village," responded Josie, her thoughts upon the disease and not upon the loss of the headman. "I'll go and see to Daffie's breakfast and interview the cook. You will have a cup of tea with us, Mr. Warradale, before you start back, won't you?"

"If it can be brought at once, I mustn't wait long," he replied.

Mrs. Envile was herself again: all trace of nervousness and excitement had gone. Margery took a seat on one of the cane chairs to wait for the tea. Envile led Warradale away on pretence of talking shop, as he called it, in his excuse to Margery.

"We shall not be five minutes," he said. As soon as he was out of hearing of Margery he continued rapidly. "I'm sorry they have come back. Things are in a most unsatisfactory state in the village. It is partly due to that grasping old sadhu, who is coining a little fortune out of the frightened people as the mouthpiece of the amma. He has threatened them in her name with a flood that will wipe out the place, if they don't propitiate her with sacrifices and offerings. A still worse offender is the mahunt, a poisonous fellow in the pay of the Germans. He has been propagating a pro-German campaign all over the country, I hear, and spreading rumours and false news; he has done his best to stir the people up to revolt. Under the pretence of helping to smooth this trouble of the amma down, he has been speaking of the other matter."

"I suppose Southam is after him?"

"Yes; and he will have him, too, before long. The fellow can't get away. The police are on the watch everywhere. Did you hear how the brute served my Overseer?"

Envile told the tale of the attempt on Basildon's life and how he had been rescued.

"The mahunt is wanted, it seems, for something besides treason," said Warradale. "Is there any likelihood of an attack being made on you and the camp?"

"I can't say what may happen. I don't think any violence will be offered as long as we don't interfere

with the original tree. The stone has been carried back to its old position."

"So Mrs. Enville told me."

"The village people believe that the amma took it back herself; but, of course, it was the old sadhu who did it."

"What are you going to do?"

"Leave everything as it is at present. I've had a wire to say that rain is falling heavily in the hills. The water will be down to-night or to-morrow at the latest. It will put a stop to all our bridge work for some days, perhaps weeks to come. It will also give the people something else to think about. They will be obliged to plough their fields as soon as the river rises high enough to flood their lands."

"Then you will return to Madura as you can do no good here?"

"That was my intention; but with cholera there, my wife won't go near the place. It is most unfortunate. I think I shall have to send her and the child up to Bangalore as soon as I can get them off. I shall just wait and see the water down and the people busy. It will relieve the tension. I hope the first flush will be a good one, for I want them all to be occupied with their ploughing and sowing. They will have no time to worry about that old devil of an amma with the waters well out."

"Then you don't think the camp will be attacked?"

"I hope not, I'm sure; because it would be the beginning of a widespread disturbance."

"You are not satisfied about it," remarked Warra-daile, as he noted the lines about Enville's mouth.

"The fact is, I believe there is something in the air, though I can't make out what it is. Perhaps Basildon will be able to find out. He understands their language better than I do."

"Meanwhile, I think you will be wise to send your party off without any delay—not later than to-morrow evening by the night mail. Can I help in any way? Shall I come over to-morrow morning? I can arrange for a day off if it is absolutely necessary."

'It might be as well. It would leave me free if any sudden crisis occurred; and with your car here you could take them away out of the danger zone. Any way, I can't go with them to the station. I shouldn't like to leave the works with the water rising.'

"Very well; expect me some time to-morrow; and I'll motor Mrs. Enville and Margery to the station. Your man can drive the servants and the luggage in your car. I may as well wire up to Bangalore from Madura as soon as I get back, and secure rooms at one of the hotels. I will also engage a sleeping-carriage. The train arrives at Bangalore at daybreak, I believe.'

"I shall be very grateful. Come and have some tea. I see Miss Longford is beginning to pour it out."

Warradale had no time to spare. As it was, he would be a little late in getting to the kutcherry. They sat down, and Enville explained to Margery, in Josie's continued absence, the plans he and Warradale had made for their visit to Ban.alore.

"Does Josie wish to go?" she asked.

"She will be glad to have a couple of months there, I'm sure," replied Enville, confidently. 'The climate will be beautiful, far better than the hills at this time of the year."

"You haven't asked her, then?"

"No; I've not had time to do so; but Warradale and I have settled it all. He will bring his car over to-morrow and help to take you all to the station. You must travel by the night mail; it will be cooler.'

Margery laughed as she looked from one plotter to the other.

"It is very strange to me how you men go right ahead without consulting anybody where your women are concerned. It's mighty kind of you to make plans; but I rather think it's up to me to fix my own. I may tell you that when I next get a move on I'm going to Madras."

Though she protested thus, she spoke without a trace of annoyance.

"Oh! by all means do as you wish," said Enville, hastily. 'We were only laying the dâk for you to



spare you the trouble. Then I take it that Josie will go to Bangalore and you will go to Madras. The arrangements will hold good all the same, and Josie changes at the junction."

Warradaile smiled with amusement. He had already had a taste of Margery's independence, but it was new to Enville.

"Why are we being hustled out of the camp like this?" she asked.

"The change will do Josie good. She has been much upset by what has occurred in Madura," said Enville.

Margery glanced at Warradaile with a slight uplifting of the eyebrows. He understood the gesture.

"Better tell Margery the truth at once," he said to Enville; then, turning to her, he continued, "The fact is, the village is in a ferment over this devil-stone business; and it would take very little to bring about an attack on the camp, and on the D.P.W. bungalow as well. Under the circumstances English women are best out of the way."

"Please don't tell my wife," added Enville.

"I thought the villagers were satisfied with everything Mr. Basildon had done. Surely they won't attack him," said Margery.

"In the ordinary course of events they would not touch him. An evil influence has been at work creating an ill-feeling against all connected with the Department; and the Overseer will not be left out if there is a row."

"And a row of some sort is undoubtedly brewing, though we can't say what form it will take," added Enville; he was relieved to be able to speak out plainly.

Warradaile looked at his watch.

"Half-past eight! Fortunately there are no police traps out here. Good-bye, Margery; hope to see you to-morrow."

She stood looking after his car. A cloud of dust marked his way as he spun along the level road. He was a good fellow, and she was fortunate in having won his love. She was irritated with herself for not feeling

more regret at the sudden termination of his visit. What was the matter with her? Why was it a relief to see him go? Was she already tired of the introductory duties of witchhood? If true, *he* or *she* was proved irresponsible, what would that of the wife be? A disturbing doubt intruded itself. Had she been dazzled by his position, and had she not seen — but, no! this would not do! With an effort she turned back the question that was formulating in her mind, and hurried to her tent.

She pulled aside the purdian and walked in. On the floor in his accustomed place with his back against the canvas wall of the tent sat Sunnee patiently waiting for her. His clothes had been hastily given to him with injunctions to put them on properly, injunctions he had totally disregarded; for the red garments of contention were serving as a turban, and the muslin that should have been bound round his head was spread shawl-fashion over his shoulders. His little naked legs were extended close together in front of him and he was carefully nursing a new-laid egg.

Every morning after repeating his prayers to Margery's photograph the child had brought the egg, and the fowl had been accommodating enough to lay, and had sat in his pristine nakedness waiting for her to come. There was something of the unreasoning fidelity of the dog in his action, the faithful beast that is always looking for his absent master. He had waited till the time that she usually took her bath; then, as she did not appear, he gave it up. The egg was deposited on the brush-tray and removed later by Mary. He departed solemnly from the tent to scud away to the shallows where the stepping-stones led across to the temple island. There he played in the warm backwaters of the stream, and rolled in the sand to dry himself.

He was obliged to watch his mother; for if he attracted her attention he found his liberty curtailed. With the childish cunning of the East he went first towards the spot where the pony was tethered, and watched with an absorbing interest the grooming process. The part that pleased him most was the washing of the pony's

face. The animal enjoyed it and licked the cool dripping sponge as it was rubbed over its nose and lips. Sunnee seated himself on his heels in front of the pony until this part of the grooming was finished. Then he went up to the syce and demanded to have his own face washed in like manner. The good-natured syce wrung out the sponge in the bucket, and passed it over the boy's lips. A crimson tongue was protruded in imitation of the pony ; and sometimes the child caught the sponge between his teeth in an ecstasy of delight.

The game over, Sunnee strolled off wandering aimlessly about behind the syce's tent ; but as soon as he was safely hidden from his mother's view and out of her mind, he slipped off to the river bank, where he was soon splashing about in the limpid water. He had wisdom enough to return before he was missed ; and Mary's fears were not aroused by a suspiciously long absence.

The little boy looked up with a confident smile as Margery entered the tent. He knew that she had arrived, as he had heard the spitting devil-carriage, and had caught a glimpse of her white sun-hat as she passed from the car to the dining-tent. He placed the egg on the mat by his side and rose to his feet. His hand went up to his forehead in a dutiful salutation. She stooped and lifted him in her arms to his intense surprise.

"You little darling ! you dear little egg-man !"

She kissed the soft smooth dusky cheek that felt like a satin cushion in its firm roundness against her own. He murmured something in his own language and nestled against her neck with childish confidence. His mother entering at the moment was startled. English ladies were wont to be kind and benevolent in their actions ; but she had never known one to show a similar mark of affection towards the dark-skinned native child.

"Ah ! bah ! what is this ?" cried Mary, taking the boy with perceptible force from Margery. "Too much troubling our missie this way," she cried, giving him an admonitory shake as she went out of the tent. She carried him towards the servants' quarters, and set him on his feet with strict injunctions that he was to go to his grannie at once and remain with her. She spoke sharply,

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in her fear lest the ill-omened encase of the day might have bestowed upon him without due precautions should bring him ill-luck.

The pretty mouth fell in disappointment. He had not been allowed an opportunity of placing his egg nor time to repeat his prayers to the beautiful woman in person. A few feet tramped over his breast as he walked sorrowfully towards the tent, where his grandmère was engaged in winding a clean white sash round her person.

"What is it, little one? Who has been grieving thee?" asked Yann, as she too lifted the child in her arms to fondle him, taking care as she did so to make the necessary passes and clucking of the knuckles to guard him from the evil spirits.

He babled forth his tale of trouble. The hens had not been behaving nicely in Yann's absence. The bird that had been laying so regularly before they left camp had ceased and was showing a disposition to brood over a stone that served as a nest-egg. Sunnee had complained to his mother of it, shortcomings, and had been told that it was saving up to lay a big one when his father returned. Every morning he felt under the clucking ruffled old hen but could find no egg. To his great joy the other hen had been seized with an egg-laying fit, and the child had brought the result to his grandmère's tent. It took some time to explain all these domestic troubles in his childish language to his grandmother; he had not finished when Daffie's voice was heard calling for Yann.

The old woman hastily finished her toilet and hurried away, Sunnee trotting unheeded at her heels. He seated himself outside Mrs. Enville's tent, and listened with wrapped attention to the sound of water splashing within, and the clear treble of Daffie's voice, as he went through her preparations for the big breakfast. Next to Mary he worshipped the fair little English girl, but it was not with the same love and adoration. Daffie was often contemptuous over his nakedness, with the natural instinct of the child who dislikes everything that is not ordered and arranged according to her own surroundings. Sunnee might admire from a distance,

but she made him feel that he was outside her existence wherein spotless white frocks, shoes, stockings and pretty ribbons were indispensable.

Mary was delighted to have her mother back, she was looking forward to being off duty for an hour, so, when she might hear all the details of the cases in Madura that had actually taken place ; rumour of others that had not occurred. There were stories of births and marriages as well ; of wife-beatings and street-fightings ; and other domestic gossip, furnished the chief subjects for conversation in the evening.

The time for all this was not yet, and both were kept fully occupied by their respective meals until noon in preparing for the migration the following day.

Meal time came at twelve o'clock, and no sooner was their dinner eaten than they both fell asleep. They had been up at daybreak ; and not even the thought of gossip in prospect could keep them awake.

Once more Sunnee was left to his own devices. His father took a short nap after his dinner and then departed to his duties at the D.P.W. bungalow. His mother-in-law and wife sound asleep.

The child accompanied him to the edge of the verandah and then returned. As Sunnee passed Marge resisted the temptation to feast his eyes on the beauty. It was too great to be resisted. He peeped in, aside the purdah ; and his face puckered with surprise as he met those eyes that were of the colour of the sea. She beckoned to him to come in. He entered and stood down in his usual place against the canvas side.

It was a pity that they had no common language in which they could talk. He did his best to communicate with her in the universal sign language that all can understand. He remembered that he had left a piece of betel nut on the mat. It was no longer there. He pointed with his finger to the spot and said, "Ileh ? heh ?" Marge guessed correctly what he meant and touched her lips, indicating that she had eaten it. He comprehended her action and laughed with satisfaction, moving his head in a childish wriggle of delight.

She gave him a small hand glass to play with,\* and for some time he amused himself by talking to his own reflection in Yann's language, scolding or petting himself as the mood prompted.

The afternoon passed. Yann and Mary both overslept themselves from honest fatigue. They rose in a flurry of haste anticipating reproof. There was still much to be done. The cushions, table-cover and odd ends of trifles used in camp had to be packed as well as the clothes and house linen, ready for return to the bungalow at Madura, or to be taken to Bangalore to adorn the somewhat bare rooms of the hotel.

Mary, bustling into the tent, found her son established there. She gave him a look which was meant for dismissal, and the little boy got up to go. At the entrance he salaamed to Margery with an cleverly deliberation that made her think of a quaint, old, and she returned the salutation with equal gravity.

"Till we meet again, Sunnee," she said in her own tongue.

Mary called after the child with a warning that he was not to go beyond the camp, and then she devoted herself with the fidelity of the well-trained Indian servant to the many duties that were before her, and Sunnee was forgotten by mistress and maid.

## CHAPTER XXIV

TEA was laid under the big banyan tree that shaded the dinner-tent. Margery and Josie were glad to sit down and rest, for they had had a busy day. The atmosphere was distinctly cooler, although the breeze had an unpleasant tendency to die away completely. The harsh hot dryness had gone, and the new moisture was apparent. It was agreeable to the lungs, but it had an uncomfortable effect on the skin, which made the temperature feel several degrees hotter instead of several degrees cooler, as it really was.

Bird and insect life recognized the signs of the times and were on the alert. Margery was startled by finding a long scaly centipede running across her tent carpet. It had travelled up the river bank and was searching for a refuge where the flood could not reach it.

The birds, usually so silent during the heat of the day, were unable to rest; and the waders called to each other continually, to pass on the good news that the water was coming. From the cultivator of the scorched acres down to the hurrying ant in its maze of tracks through the parched grass-stalks, every living being was conscious of the approaching change.

Enville turned up for tea. He was preoccupied and unusually silent. Josie was too much absorbed in her preparations for the visit to Bangakre to notice his silence. She did the talking, and he was relieved to find that she had quite recovered from her nervousness over the cholera. But although she chattered so much about herself and her own affairs, she was not altogether unkindful of her husband.

"I am so sorry to be leaving you like this, Guy," she said, as she handed him his second cup.

"It can't be helped. You are sensible enough to understand that I should not send you away if I did not think that it would be a wise movement for all concerned."

His words relieved her of responsibility and made her feel that she was carrying out his rather than her own wishes in going to a place where the climate was perfect and she would have all the society she could desire. She turned to Margery.

"You really ought to come with us, Margery, and put off your visit to Madras. You will find it horribly steamy by the sea."

"I shall not mind the heat. We have it hot and steamy by the sea in California."

"Have another cup, Margery? No! Then if you will excuse me I will go back to Yann. She can't pick to save her life."

Josie bustled away. Envile had not yet finished his tea. Margery glanced at him and said—

"How is Mr. Basildon?"

Envile and his wife usually spoke of him as Overseer Basildon, but Margery retained the prefix to his name to which she had grown accustomed on board ship.

"He is all right as far as his health is concerned, but, like me, he is worried over the village."

"That was a pretty near thing, as close to murder as it could be."

He looked sharply at her.

"You heard, then, of the rough handling he got."

"He told me himself."

He wondered where she had met Basildon. Josie had been too busy to tell him all that had occurred at Madura.

"You have seen him, then?"

"What is the real trouble in the village?" she asked, letting his remark pass without comment.

If she had been Josie, he would have put her off with a suggestion that there was no special difficulty with the people; but Margery was different; she was more seasoned to the world's rough handling and less likely to be troubled with nerves.



"I can't tell you anything more than I was explaining to Warradaile this morning. Since he left I have seen Basildon. He is positive that the village is in a ferment about something unusual. Whether it is an attack on us, or upon the work we have done in connection with the new road which threatened the amma's tree, he can't say. It is possible that the people may be thinking of another blood sacrifice. I hope it may be so. I would willingly give them a dozen goats if they would take them; but they won't. They say that the buffalo was not accepted by the amma as a gift from the village but from me." He laughed at the thought of it. "As if I wanted to propitiate that old bogey! and she is angry because they have given nothing. To appease her they must provide a sacrifice themselves. I should be glad to see that they were collecting goats, as is their custom before their festivals; but I haven't heard of any being driven in from the villages round about. It is all that old sadhu's doing; and the mahunt has only made matters worse."

He lighted a cigarette and took up his hat and stick. "Grafters, both of them," said Margery, with a sudden wrath that surprised even herself. "They ought to be in the hands of the police."

"Certainly the mahunt should be in jail," assented Enville. "It is a pity they can't shoot him for high treason."

He walked away, and Margery strolled over to Josie's tent.

"I am going for a walk along the river bank," she said, looking in.

"You won't mind, will you? if I don't come with you," answered Josie. "I am tired out with all I have done to-day; and I am going to enjoy the luxury of an armchair under the shade of the trees as soon as I have finished."

"Not in the least," replied Margery, who if the truth were told preferred to go alone. She had plenty of food for thought, and was glad to have a quiet hour before her to consider the incidents of the last twenty-four hours.

Five minutes later she was picking her way over the grass towards the river bank. Ever since her return that morning she had felt the call of the river, and now the opportunity had come of responding to it. She was glad that Jo-ic had not accepted her invitation to walk with her. It was pleasanter to be alone. The river had no attraction for Mrs. Enville. She was familiar with it as a troublesome feature of the district that had lately been as a thorn in her husband's side. Jo-ic was heartily sick of it, and of the bridge and the idiotic villagers, whose opposition had caused so much vexation. Hers was not a temperament that was in touch with the psychic side of Nature.

Margery felt that the summons of the river had been to herself alone. The slumbering giant was on the verge of waking from its hot-weather sleep; and she wanted to see the awakening; to watch the first stirrings of its life from within; its uprising into activity, and the investment in its own masterful way of its sandy bed.

She arrived at the edge of the bank and looked across the wide expanse. Dormant still, its ribbon of blue water crept over the pale sands; a newly-formed pool gleamed here and there in the afternoon sunlight, and a fresh thread of silver linked it with the old pools.

As her eyes rested on the grey empty waterway, a sense of her own smallness and insignificance fell upon her, strangely dwarfing her personality. She had experienced something of the same sensation when she first gazed upon one of the cañons of the Rockies; but there the rugged grandeur had leaped at her with blatant magnificence that insisted on being recognized, and which claimed its measure of admiration to the last word. Here the strength and size of the giant was veiled in a gentleness that said, "Touch me, handle me, let the child play with me; I will do the world no wrong." Even as the shining pools broadened and the silver threads multiplied, the appearance of gentleness was maintained.

Margery heard the soft fall of naked feet behind her. She turned and saw Sunnee. He smiled and ran towards her, stretching out both arms; but his eyes

went beyond and sought the river. Did he feel the call also? He gave a childish chuckle and said something in his own tongue. Was he inviting her to go forward and take the path to his favourite shallows? She had no intention of going down to the level of the river where she would lose its grandeur in the dead level of the sand.

"No, Sunnee, not to-day. It is too late for paddling."

She could not be sure if he understood her words. It was evident that he divined for himself the fact that she intended to continue her walk along the top of the river bank, a route that had no attraction for him. There was nearly an hour to sunset. This would give her time for a leisurely stroll beyond the tope before the sun sank behind the masses of heavy cloud lying over the mountains.

The child stopped and looked after her retreating figure. Once she glanced back to see if he followed. He laughed and began to run towards the camp as if to assure her of his intentions. Since she would not go with him, he had no mind, she concluded, to obey the call of the river and seek the shallows by himself.

The moon was in its second quarter. It floated in the eastern sky pale and ghostly in the fierce glow of the afternoon sun. Should she be a little late in returning it would light her way to the camp.

Now and then she stopped to gaze across at the distant bank on the opposite side. Strange cries came from birds busy on the sands. Some were already on the wing bound for fresh feeding grounds; others called restlessly to the loiterers and circled round the newly-formed pools.

The sun sank before she reached the camp and it was almost dark when she arrived at her tent.

Two hours later dinner was over and the servants placed the chairs as usual under the fly of the large tent. A hurricane lamp stood on a table, and here Enville sat as a rule, to smoke his cigarette and read if he happened to be so inclined.

During dinner Josie had talked of Bangalore and all

she intended doing there. It was evident to Margery that she was looking forward with great pleasure to her visit. Enville was silent except when a response from him was demanded. Margery's thoughts turned frequently to Basildon. The story of the suffering he had endured at the hands of the mahunt lingered in her memory. She wished with all her heart that the villain might be caught and receive just punishment. Then the sudden passionate words Basildon had spoken rang in her ears, and the hot blood mounted to her forehead. She thrust the memory aside. The revelation was accidental; it was only due to him that she should forget as quickly as possible that he had ever spoken.

As soon as Enville could leave the table he rose, and pleading as an excuse some letter-writing he left them.

"I think I shall go to bed," said John. "I was awake at dawn. What a long day we have had. It seems like two run into one. You had better follow my example, Margery."

"Presently," said Margery; and she went outside and sank into a chair.

The afternoon breeze had died down, and it was one of those calm evenings that come at the change of the monsoon. The mountains had already felt the breath of the north-east wind with the consequent showers. Plumps of tropical rain had fallen, a foretaste of the torrents that were due a little later. In between the storms there were gleams of fierce hot sunshine that set every bud growing. The planters call this first burst of the rains the little monsoon.

Margery was disinclined to read. The light from the hurricane lamp seemed to spoil the beauty of the night. She wanted to get away from it and be alone with the river world. The moon in its second quarter, brilliant as a full moon in the temperate zone, reminded her of the drive to Sirraloor, and of the many strange sounds of the Indian night with which she made acquaintance for the first time. She smiled as she recalled her startled fear when the jackals gave tongue. Familiarity with their cry had come since then. A night

rarely passed without their baying. Sometimes it was close at hand on the outskirts of the village ; sometimes the tonguing of the pack sounded from the river bed, where they searched the edge of the water for flotsam and jetsam. Nothing came amiss to the hungry scavengers.

She rose and went to her tent ; changed her shoes and slipped on a dust coat to protect her dress from the rough spear-heads of the dry grass. Mindful of Basil-don's advice she took her walking-stick, and without a word to anyone she left the camp by the path that led to the river bank.

The wide waterway had a new charm under the soft light of the moon. The massed shadows and the broad stretches of faint light obliterated detail and veiled the river in a mysterious indistinctness. It came from an unseen land and flowed down into a shrouded horizon, limitless and unknown.

The moon hanging high in the eastern sky threw the bridge and its piers into deep shadow. The silvery reflection was caught by the stream of water flowing between the last pier and the village. It also discovered the presence of a newly-formed rivulet, that flowed on the other side of the pier and turned the spit of land on which the temple and the pier were built into an island.

Margery could not remember if she had seen the rivulet before. Perhaps it had been there ; but she had not noticed it until the moon had changed it into a thread of burnished silver. Water also gleamed under the distant arches of the old part of the bridge. The streaks suggested pools left by a retiring tide on a sandy beach, shallow, peaceful and harmless.

A melancholy wail sounded overhead in a long-drawn "Wa-a-a-ak!" It was the night heron on its way to new feeding grounds. Well might the villagers believe that it was the call of the river god to his wife on shore! Margery looked up into the star-strewn sky but could see nothing.

The bird passed on, and presently came the real quack of ducks, as a flock of wildfowl, following the familiar V-shaped flight swept seawards, where the backwaters stretched with their noisome beds of black

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ooze. An owl shrieked among the banyan trees behind her with a strangled cry; and, as if in response, a restless curlew screamed a wild greeting from the river bed. Little snippets and stilts that should have been asleep tilted plaintive'y as the water encroached upon their roosting-places among the reeds, or on the warm sands. In every direction the stirring of the river was apparent.

As she stood on the top of the bank, eyes and ears alert for the voices of the night, something brushed through the tope with swift footsteps and came towards her. Out of the shadow of the trees emerged Mary, her ayah, Sunnee's mother.

"Mary! what is it? What is the matter? Has Mrs. Enville sent you for me?"

"No, missie! It is the child I am looking for. He is gone!"

She spoke in a low voice as though afraid of being overheard: the end of her sarce was drawn over her head and across her mouth, as though she were making use of it to stifle the cries that were prompted by her maternal fears.

"He has wandered into the tope at the back of the syce's tent probably, and has fallen asleep in the warm grass. Sunnee knows his way about better than any of us," said Margery. "Have you sent his father to look for him?"

"The peon is not here; he has not yet come home for his food. The Overseer master is keeping him late at the bungalow."

"And Yunn, where is she?"

"With the big mistress, still packing, packing, and now putting to bed. Aiyoh! what will she say when she knows that I have lost the boy! Oh! the little budmash! He must be well beaten!"

"When did you see him last?"

"When he followed missie this afternoon. I thought he was taking a walk with missie."

"He came as far as this and no further. Then he turned back as if he intended to go to the camp. When did you last see him?" she asked again

"That time only. Plenty busy all this afternoon and evening; no time to look after the child! What can do? Oh! what can do?"

Mary advanced to the spot where the path led down to the shallows beloved of Sunnee.

"You don't suppose that he has gone to the river at this time of the night?"

"Can't tell; that naughty boy walking too much alone."

Poor little fellow! If he had not taken his walks alone he would have had no exercise at all, thought Margery.

"What makes you think that Sunnee has gone to the river?" she asked.

Mary covered her mouth with her hand, and murmured behind it in a trembling whisper as though she feared a mysterious listener.

"The temple! that old poojaree."

"What, the sadhu? he would not harm the child."

"That man calling the child sometimes. Oh! missie! I dare not tell my mother or my husband. They would beat me. One day the poojaree made Sunnee do poojah to the river god. That boy, too naughty; always telling prayers. Our priests teach us that if we do poojah to the heathen devils, we put ourselves in their power. If Sunnee has gone down to the temple, the river god will keep him there till the sun rises. Oh! what can do?" she wailed. "Oh! holy Mary, have mercy! St. Joseph! have pity!"

She began to cry, but made heroic efforts to restrain her grief and keep it silent and under control. She feared the just wrath of her mother and husband, and their condemnation of her own carelessness in losing sight of the child for so long a time. She dared not express her fears to them, as she had done to Margery, because she was afraid to let them know the true reason. Her tears found a way to the ready pity of her mistress's heart.

"Don't cry, Mary; I'll go and look for him. The moon is bright enough for me to go down to the river. I shall find him all right if he is there."

Mary caught Margery's skirt and lifted it in a gratitude.

"Oh! the good Jesus have mercy; the blessed Virgin be good to us and bring back Samne!"

"Come with me and look for the child."

Mary hesitated. She feared the reaction of Wit the water coming down her will be a little too strong to meet the amma; but she dared not give her real reason for her refusal.

"I must go and get my mother's things together, my husband's also. They will be angry if I am not there when they come to the tent."

"Very well; you go back and I will look for Samne. Have no fear; if he is down there, I shall find him. By-the-bye, he may be with his grandmother in Mr. Enville's tent. Have you looked there?"

"Ah! bah! no! what a stupid woman I am!"

Margery laughed; she was convinced that the child would not wander from the camp. The light of the spirits abroad after sunset would be sufficient to keep him from straying. Mary ran back with new hope springing in her heart. It was dashed all to pieces. Yann had not seen him since four o'clock, when she had given him a drink of coffee from her cup, while her mistress was at tea.

Nellappa returned tired and hungry. He had been in attendance on his master in a long and tiring session of the bridge at the other side of the river; they had returned by the ferry coracle. He took his meal at the same time as Yann but apart from her. It was not until both had finished that an inquiry was made as to the child.

Mary lifted the blanket as though she expected to find him there. She expressed her consternation at his absence and began to run about, calling the child, as though she were missing him now for the first time. Ten minutes later she returned looking frightened and began to cry.

"He was here a short time ago. I thought he was asleep under the blanket!" She lifted the various coverings and searched again. "I can't find him!"



can't find him! the little budmash! Ah! he shall have a beating this time! making so much trouble!"

"Where did you see him last?" asked Yann, giving her daughter a good shake.

"Here! here by the fire when I cooked the rice. He was saying grace, the bad, wicked boy! Then the missie called and I had to go."

"Did you give him food?"

"Yes; when I took my own!" replied Mary, glibly. Yann looked closely at her and knew that she was not speaking the truth.

"Son, go to the village and see if the child is with the village children. There will be a tamarsha to-night at the amma's tree."

The peon went off at once. Yann herself turned into the tope on the chance of finding the boy asleep under a tree. If Mary had been her daughter-in-law the truth would have been forced from her by the aid of rough usage; but as she was her own offspring, she forebore to pour reproaches upon her for her carelessness. She remembered, too, that the day had been strenuous; that the mistress had been exacting in the matter of packing; that Miss Longford had in all probability made similar though lesser demands on Mary; and that it would have been impossible to have kept a watchful eye on the boy all the afternoon.

As Yann returned from her fruitless hunt, another night heron uttered its cry high up over the village. She shuddered. The river god was awake!

The villagers had heard the call also. Indeed, they were waiting for it. They came out of their houses and gathered in a wide circle round the condemned tree. A tomtom sounded and the people responded to the night-bird's call with their tremulous wail.

Enville looked up from his writing. He was drafting a report of his failure to finish the work within the appointed time; it was not an easy task.

"Basildon was right. That means a blood feast. So much the better for us. They won't attack the camp or the works if they are busy over a sacrifice."

A sigh of relief escaped him as he resumed his writing.

## CHAPTER XXV

MARGERY was convinced that any search by the river for Sunnee would be fruitless. She did not believe that he could have wandered beyond the camping-ground for the reason already cited. The neglected child was probably asleep under a rug in the cyclo's tent, or he might have tucked himself away among the many bundles in the servants' quarters, and been overlooked in the dark.

She remembered her promise to Mary, however, and a moonlight walk had its attractions. There was a fascination in the thought that she would have the river to herself. The little world of Sirraloor was far too much occupied with its own affairs to be wandering aimlessly like herself along the river bank. She looked across towards the opposite shore. The pools shone with a pearly whiteness, in their setting of sand, like so many open eyes, watching and waiting for a call from the unseen world. They had increased, and were linked together by a network of rivalets.

In the west, the mountains were hidden under masses of moonlit cloud. Pale threads of lightning flickered over the heavy bank, letting loose the torrential rain that was the fount of the river's strength. By the aid of that distant downpour the river would rise and push its way towards the sea, distributing the fertilizing waters over an enormous tract of land.

She wondered where Basil don was at that moment, and whether he dined late. Did he stroll out into the moonlight, and wander about while he smoked? or did he sit, like Enville, with a hurricane lamp behind him, straining his eyes over the daily paper? He must have

been abroad frequently during the night hours other wise he could not have told her so much about the Indian night on their way from the station. He had no marble palace to keep him contented within its pillared verandahs like Waiwadaile. The white-washed burgalow, provided by Government, with its thatched lean-to apology for a verandah had more attraction for bats, toady cats, and snakes than for a human being. Perhaps at this very moment he, too, was looking down upon the river, and the great bridge that should by this time have been completed.

The night was beautiful, and the air pleasant and inviting. She used her stick as Basildon had directed, and moved slowly down the path towards the river. The lizards had retired to their holes, and the insect-world on which they preyed had crept away to sleep in the security of sheltering leaf and root.

The moon shone full upon her path, and she reached the stepping-stones without any unpleasant encounter. The stream had risen to the level of the flat surface of the stones. One or two of them, not quite up to the level of the others, had thin films of water flowing over them. She crossed without difficulty, and looked round for trace of the child.

The stream was too high in its present condition for it to have been possible for him to wade through it to the other side. If he had crossed at all, it must have been by the stones. The child's instinct of self-preservation was as strongly developed as that of any rat or lizard, and she felt assured in her mind that Mary was wrong in thinking that he had sought the river on the temple.

No sign of the boy being visible, Margery dismissed him from her thoughts and gave herself up to the enjoyment of the night. Now that she had come so far, it seemed a pity to return without paying a visit to the quaint little shrine of the river god. The water washed the sand gently with tiny wavelets, and the ripples broke with a gentle bubbling at her feet. In mid-stream the eddies lapped and sucked round the stones over which she had passed. She measured with her eye the boundary

of the water, and stood watching it for a while. Apparently, it was not rising. If anything it was beginning to retire. In her ignorance of the habits of rivers in South India she concluded that the ebbs and flows were as gentle and regular as the tide on the English coast. She knew nothing of the treacherous surface of the wave it lies of turbid water that lashed impetuously down the river bed sweeping everything before it in a destructive confusion, and she was ignorant that the waves they possessed of altitudes its geography was of its channels and newly-formed islands and pools.

Without suspicion of danger, she walked onward on the stepping-stones, and directed her steps towards the temple.

The squat building stood in black outline against the moonlit sky, rising in the solitude of the river bed, out of which the low expanse that nooned the air grew for need. Behind it, a hundred yards farther away, and still in deep shadow on its western side, was the line of the ridge.

She caught sight of the last yellow corner of lamps in the temple. They were small points of light that bespoke the presence of rain. As he walked he disturbed a rat that was migrating, finding summer quarters to a safer shelter than the shadow of the river afforded. It fled past him with the swiftness of a dark ball, set rolling by some unseen hand. A little further on a long, sinuous form, like the end of a rope, wiggled out of her way. The snake and the rat were at deadly variance; but a common danger had sent them both hurrying along the same path to escape the destructive march of the river, which an equally common instinct had told them was turning from its summer sleep. The streams and pools were no more to them. They could breast the shallows, but they could not withstand the mighty torrent in its full strength.

A figure loomed out of the shadow of the temple and approached her rapidly. Against the moonlight it looked wild and tattered a bundle of rags and streamers. She recognized the old sadhu, and turned to gaze after him. He strode towards the stepping-stone like a man

in a dream and gave no sign of recognition. She doubted if in his drugged state he was aware of her presence. She called to him to stop. He might be able to tell her if the child had visited the temple that evening. He did not seem to hear her. Under the influence of his fanaticism he was deaf to everything but the dictates of the evil spirit under whose power he had voluntarily placed himself, and whom he avowedly served. He passed over the stones, and Margery could just distinguish his figure in the moonlight, as he mounted the bank and went in the direction of the amma's tree.

It was not easy walking, and Margery picked her steps with care, tapping the ground with the stick. Now and then she could hear the soft scuttle of feet as a dark object fled away in terror; whether reptile or animal she could not say.

She reached the temple and stopped before the low steps that led up to the image. The head of the idol was higher than her own as she stood at the foot of the steps. The staring eyes seemed in the dim light of the lamps to be looking into hers with a sinister expression of malignity. The lights were produced from cotton wicks floating in little saucers of oil. They were placed in niches in the wall and formed a semicircle round the idol.

"You beauty!" said Margery, as she contemplated it. "I'll bet my last dollar that that old grafter of a sadhu makes a fine thing out of you. He has been doing poojah to you, I suppose. Now I wonder what your taste might be in the things they give you. With your kind permission I'll just have a look at your display; but first let me make sure that there isn't another old grafter left in charge."

She walked round the temple and peered about at the back. She could see nothing of any human being, and concluded that she had the place to herself, a conclusion that was correct. Returning to the steps, she mounted and stood again before the image.

Round the pedestal at its foot was a curious collection of offerings—a couple of bunches of bananas, two or three trays of rice, some leaf platters containing

sugar, beet and honey cake. They were arranged in a semi-circle. Inside the curve and lying close against the pedestal, was a large bundle of something, but wrapped in a cloth. Could it be any of the sacrificial animal—a goat or a cow?

She leaned across the row of offerings and put on her hand to touch it, fully prepared to encounter the coldness of death. It was just as when the sadhu had departed. Her hand would have fallen into a frenzy and terrified the villagers if they had heard it.

To her intense astonishment the bundle was soft and warm. She passed her hand along its top curve and recognized a human form. The head, the arms, the shoulders and hips were unmistakable. The body was turned towards the idol. She felt the tug and fall of the living being as its death came feebly. She slipped her hand over the heart, that alone beating regularly.

Suddenly enlightenment flashed through her brain. It was Sunnee!

She stepped over the offerings, stooped down and lifted the unconscious child from the ground. Holding him tightly in her arms, she moved back, and went swiftly down the steps. A fear lest the sadhu should be returning seized her, and she looked anxiously in the direction of the stepping-stones. She must return that way; there was no other, except by the ferry, and at this time of night there would be no one within hail to fetch her.

She hid the child under her cloak and hurried as fast as she could in the light of the moon over the rock. As she stepped off the dark gneiss on to the sand her foot went into a shallow puddle of water. She did not remember having seen any pool or stream in going to the temple, and she wondered if she had mistaken the way. She scanned the river bank in the distance and recognized the outline of the trees under which the camp was pitched. She could also distinguish the line of the village with its palms against the sky. No, she had made no mistake, the road she was taking would lead her right enough to the stepping stones.

There was no time to stop and try to solve the mystery of the puddle. She must push on as quickly as possible, and get back to the camp before the sadhu returned ; she supposed he would do so as soon as he had collected the people.

A ghastly conviction was stealing over her. The boy was the sacrifice in this case, offered to the river god. She inferred by his inert stillness that he had been drugged by some means or other, and had been left there by the sadhu. She concluded that the old man would come later with the villagers and complete the sacrifice in the dead of night with the temple knife.

It was horrible ! She shuddered at the thought. The deliberate devilry of it made her blood run cold.

She directed her steps to the spot where she believed she would find the stepping-stones. Somehow as she approached the stream it looked different. The opposite bank was further off than it should have been, and she could see no sign of the stones. She must have come to the wrong place.

Moving up the stream with the trees of the tope exactly in front she searched the stream in the bright moonlight. Ripples and eddies and miniature whirlpools deceived her frequently. She thought she saw the stones, and as she looked they vanished before her eyes, proving to be nothing but the fantastic figures drawn by the running water in the moonlight. She turned and hurried back along the stream ; but still no sign of them was visible.

Then she realized what had happened. The waters had risen since she had crossed, and the stepping-stones had disappeared beneath the flood. She was a prisoner on the island with, as far as she knew, no means of reaching the bank, until she could attract the attention of the fisherman who owned the coracle ferry-boat.

The prospect of passing the night on the island was not pleasant. The only shelter was the temple itself. She wondered if she could make herself heard in the camp. Enville would be still up, and probably Basildon would be about. The noise of the tomtoms round the

tree filled the air, and she had little hope that her voice could dominate the drumming.

Without wasting precious minutes she gave a call and followed it up with others. The only answer was the scream of an unseen bird flying over the water. Possibly her cry was heard by the villagers and ascribed to the devil; for the tomtoming increased, and the wail of the worshippers rose more strongly on the air. She could see the flare from the torches as the people stood round the tree and watched the poojah done to the stone beneath.

Enville, busy in his tent, put down all human shouts as part of the ritual of devil worship. He concluded that Margery had followed Josie's example and had gone to bed. He devoutly wished that the people would give up shrieking and shouting and would go to bed too.

As Margery stood by the edge of the stream giving an occasional call for help, she was startled by an unexpected movement of the water. The stream which had actually retired a few inches from the spot where she stood bubbled forward in a small wave; and she found herself standing in a shallow pool. The movement was extremely gentle, the water spreading in tiny streams and joining up here and there to form large puddles.

She had no wish to get her feet wetter than they had already become, and she retreated towards the temple. The increased flow of water caused a fresh scuttling of the creatures. Faint shadowy forms shot across the sand with incredible swiftness like autumn leaves blown by a gale. They were land-crabs flooded out of their holes by the water. A darker object that looked like a pebble in its stillness became suddenly animated at her approach, and leaped away in blind jerks. It was a large bull-frog seeking rather than avoiding the flood that it might escape the snake.

Gradually Margery was driven back till she reached the ridge of rock on which the temple stood. There she felt comparatively safe, the top of the ridge being three or four feet above the level of the sand.



She avoided the temple. The thought of the grinning image as a near companion was not pleasant. In addition she was still haunted by the fear lest the sadhu should return and discover her theft.

For several minutes she stood straining her eyes in the moonlight to catch sight of a moving form that might indicate rescue, or the dreaded advent of the old fanatic. Once a bird floated down out of the sky on silent outspread wings. It was a large owl. It settled on the top of the steps before the idol among the offerings. Finding nothing to its taste, it rose with two or three ghostly flaps of its wings and departed, skimming over the water in search of the bodies of the unfortunate creatures caught by the flood.

Margery's arms were beginning to ache, for the child was heavy in its drugged sleep. She sat down and laid him on her knees, drawing her cloak round him. As she looked across the river she was filled with a growing uneasiness. How high would the flood rise? Would she be compelled, after all, to spend the night cheek by jowl with that horrible image whose extended arms seemed waiting for the victims of the flood? She would have to sit on the very spot where she found the child; and if the waters rose beyond that height, she might be compelled to climb up and take refuge on the lap of the idol.

Her attention was diverted from the contemplation of the unpleasant possibilities of the situation by a distant sound. It was not unlike the breeze brushing through the stiff fronds of the palmyras. No palm-trees were near enough for their rustle to be audible. What could it be? The wings of many birds or the rush of many feet? Her curiosity was soon satisfied.

A gush of muddy water bearing on its curve sticks and dead leaves, approached the rock with a soft swish, submerging the lower part. It did not reach her where she sat, but she thought it advisable to be nearer to the temple, which occupied the highest point of the ridge.

In the brilliant moonlight shining full upon the crest of the wave, she could distinguish the struggling legs of some small furry animal and the scaly form of

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a lizard. A snake made desperate efforts to disengage its coils from the debris and obtain sufficient freedom to swim with its head above water till the flood carried it safely to some bank. The snake was too much engaged in liberating itself to trouble about the presence of its natural enemy, man, in the person of Margery. She watched the reptile till it was thrown on the rock, and followed its motion, as well as the light would allow, till it vanished in the distance.

The animal whatever it was, seemed too fatigued to make any effort to recover itself. It was drawn onwards in the flood and floated down the stream. The lizard clung like grim death to the rock with its clawed feet till the water had slightly receded. Then, recovering itself, it waddled off in a bewildered fashion till it reached the temple. There it waited motionless, with palpitating throat, for the next cataclysm that should overtake its world.

Margery came to the conclusion that it would be best for her to conquer her aversion to the river, and seek shelter on the temple steps. The walking was not easy, but she arrived without accident and took up her position with her back to the image. The outlook was not encouraging. The sounds of the night were many, but they did not include the voices of human beings other than the frequently raised wail of the worshippers. She heard the cries of birds, the gentle wash of water, the squeak of a trapped and drowning handiwork, the tomtomming on shore, and the tonguing of the jackal on the river banks. Not one of them gave hope of rescue.

She consoled herself with the thought that the air was not cold, and that she might be sure of having it dry overhead. It seemed strange that such a flood should be possible without a drop of rain. If she had to remain where she was all night, it would be no great hardship, although it might prove very fatiguing to sit up and nurse the unconscious child. The temple was the best place of refuge in spite of its hideous idol. After all it was only a carved bit of stone, she told herself. The building was near enough to the village for her to be seen at daylight from the bank, and she

was sure that Enville or Basilton would soon find a means of rescuing her.

From her seat on the top step she could see how the river was spreading, how it was awakening into greatness and was gathering strength. Josie had described how in full flood it brought down the trunks of huge forest trees, the bodies of drowned creatures large and small, with occasionally an unfortunate washed man, who had been caught asleep on the sands; and it filled its banks from side to side with one vast sheet of water. What was the height she mentioned that it rose in a single night after a heavy monsoon downpour? Twenty-five to thirty feet? a height that reached almost to the top of the square wedge-shaped tower above the shrine.

Suddenly a terrible contingency presented itself to her mind. How high would the river rise to-night? If the temple were submerged before dawn, the river god would obtain his prey. Not only would the child be sacrificed to its greed, but she herself would be taken by the all-devouring flood. There was no need to draw the sacrificial knife across the throat of the doomed creature that was to satisfy the demon's cruel lust for human life. The water would be the priest for the river and slay the victim. Only a few hours ago the river had seemed so gentle, so innocent of evil design. It had lured her to its banks with its fascinating beauty and latent strength. Now it had assumed the character of a dreadful monster, a monster from whom there was no escape.

Fear of the river mastered her. She laid the child down and rose to her feet, and she screamed for help, moving backwards and forwards along the ridge in her agitation, and waved her arms in a frantic effort to attract attention.

## CHAPTER XXV

BOSWICK had wished to see her, and he was seated in his own armed chair in the little room at the bungalow. His thoughts were full of her and her matters. Carvalho's death had been his first, so much because it was a misfortune to the poor family, as on account of its having been the cause of his meeting Mrs. Longford. He expected to appear there, her sympathy with the cause, and her kindness towards the children, would have been an unexpected discovery to him. What he found in her character appeared to him freely. He felt that such a nature could be faithful to the cause of her sympathy to any human being without regard to position or birth. The secret of his courage to tell his own tale, and to do so, he had not been disappointing. The relation of the story had done him good and lifted the cloud from his heart, and he felt the better for his confession.

The sudden declaration of his love was sudden and unintentional. When he spoke he did not know that she was already engaged to Warradale. Though the news came as a kind of shock, it made no difference to him. Never for one moment did he dare to hope that she could be more to him than a friend. Even that position had its difficulties. He knew Warradale, a courteous, upright Englishman far removed from the country of cold fate from any intimacy with a man in his own position, however much they might both desire that it should be otherwise. Their spirits or souls would be separate and apart, and there was no possibility of any reciprocal companionship between them. Warradale's wife would be even still further removed and more inaccessible than the Collector himself.

Yet with his full knowledge of the situation, he did not regret having been surprised into telling her that he loved her. Great heavens! how he loved her! He, who had never before been attracted by women! He, who had never before been in love!

What did it mean? he asked himself. It meant this; that as it was a hopeless love, it would have to be thrust out of his life at all costs. It must be conquered for her sake as well as his own. There was only one way of doing it. He must never see her again. Before she returned to Madura he must have left the place. A transfer might be effected or he could ask Enville to send him to the furthest corner of the district.

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe with unnecessary violence and rose from his seat. His thoughts had got beyond endurance, and before long his temper would be in the same condition.

The beating of the tomtoms in the village diverted his attention. Like his superior officer, he was not sorry to find that the people were once more occupied in a popular and comparatively harmless manner. "Inflaming themselves with idols under every green tree" might imperil their souls, but it would not bring the English to a violent end; nor would it foster the seeds of treason sown by the mahunt. The sound of the drumming came from the direction of the amma's tree. He put on his cap and took up the staff he usually carried at night as a walking-stick. It was a lathee loaded and ferruled at the lower end.

He strolled to the river bank, stopping at the spot where the bridge was to meet the new road. The stones for casing the embankment were piled at a little distance further back. They could not be placed in position till the tree was removed and the metalling of the road was completed. As Basildon stood looking down on the bridge, his back to the crowd of worshippers round the tree, a man approached him. He was the D.P.W. watchman, whose duty it was to guard the plant and Government sheds belonging to the works.

"Sir, the waters are rising. The river god awakes. He has called for his wife, and together they will ride down

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on the flood to-night. "The people are going to pray to the amma, so that she may bring plenty and fill the tanks and courses."

"No doubt there will be plenty of water. The showers have been heavy on the hills," responded Basildon, with a touch of the impatience he always felt at the mention of the amma's name. "Have you seen to it that all the tools are securely packed away out of reach of the water?"

"Yes, sir; they are in the shed behind my bungalow."

"You have left nothing down there on the bank by the new pier?"

"Nothing but the bamboo ladders; and they are tied to the scaffolding."

"There were some coils of rope; what has become of them?"

"They lie on the top of the pier covered over with palm-leaf mats."

"Is the coracle below?"

"Yes, sir; but the boatmen are doing poojah at the tree."

"I don't want them; I can manage the boat myself if I have any necessity to use it." He gazed across the changing river. "Watchman! There is some one moving near the temple. Who is it? The old sadhu?"

"The sadhu is at the tree doing poojah. No one is down there, sir. With the river rising it would not be safe. The villagers know too well how treacherous it is when it is awaking from its hot-weather sleep."

"I tell you there is some one. It is probably some budmash of a thief after the rope and any tools the workmen may have left on the scaffolding."

"No, sir! no!" persisted the watchman. "No one would venture near the temple at a time like this; for the god awakes with the river. Since master took part in the poojah his eyes are opened — "; he stopped, gazing significantly at the Englishman.

Basildon understood what he meant; but he was not going to admit either to himself or to a believer in Indian devils that he had been drawn any nearer to the spiritual

world of the people. With an exclamation of impatience he turned away and descended the river bank by a series of steps cut in the earth. He distrusted the word of the old man, and determined to make sure by ferrying himself across and using his own eyes to verify the truth of the statement.

He round the coracle and the long bamboo punting-pole with which it was propelled. The water had risen about four feet, and the current had spent much of its strength in spreading over the flat surface of its bed. It was strongest close against the bank but not too strong for the boat.

He lowed the coracle higher up the stream and got into it. It was swept swiftly down towards the pier like a drifting leaf. A few vigorous pushes with the pole sent it forward out of the centre of the current and brought it under control.

Still describing circles it neared the base of the pier, the usual landing-place. He caught at a pile and held up the boat. In another minute he had landed safely in the shadow of the great pillar of masonry. It was not his intention to stay long. His object was to discover if anything of value had been left at the foot of the pier, any baskets of tools or Government property for which he and his superior officer were responsible.

He searched the ground hastily, poking into dark corners with his lathe and on his guard against the migratory snake. The volume of water might increase at any moment and make the passage back across the stream a trifle more laborious for the punter. He was about to loosen the boat, intending to tow it up stream, so that he should not be carried too far below the village in landing, when he was startled by a call. It was no bird nor animal, but a human voice in distress, and it came from the direction of the temple. He listened, and the call was repeated. The voice sounded like that of a boy. Some lad looking after cattle had been overtaken by the flood and had sought refuge on the temple island. It was probably his form that he had seen moving about near the building, and whom he had taken for a thief.

Basildon was aware of the capriciousness of the ways of the river. Although this coming of the water was only a preliminary of the larger flood, no one could tell how high it would rise. He had known the river rise fifteen feet in twelve hours and subside as quickly. The numbers of boats laden with wheat, sent into the irrigation tanks and channels, then over salt lakes and rivers, tended to swallow up the flood. At the best of times only a small volume of water reached the sea. The great wide river that looked so unimportant when at Siraloor, and which required a cyclopaean bridge to span it, broke into a hundred small streams at the delta and reached the sea in a network of rivulets. If any child were marooned on the temple island, he would run a risk of being washed off before dawn, unless he climbed to the very pinnacle of the tower.

There was but one course open, and that was to rescue the boy as quickly as he could, and hasten to Providence to give him the necessary time. He set out at once towards the temple, following along the top of the river. The idol faced up the river. He was approaching the building from down stream and could see nothing of its lights or of any figure that might be standing on the steps.

Again the cry fell on his ear. He started back, calling in Tamil to the wanderer to come, and come quickly. A figure appeared from the other side of the temple and hurried towards him. To his astonishment he recognized it to be that of a woman; and, judging by the outline, she was of his own nationality. As she approached him the moon shone full on her face.

"Margery Long for I!" he cried in his astonishment and unable to believe his eyes. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh! Mr. Basilston!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "How thankful I am to see you! The water is rising! It is creeping over the rock."

"Yes; we have no time to lose. What are you carrying under your cloak?"

"The child!" she replied in a voice that betrayed her agitation.



She threw aside the cloak and showed him her unconscious burden. He took the boy from her arms and threw him across his shoulder.

"Come along as fast as you can. I have the ferry-boat over there by the pier."

She heard him with intense relief. How great the relief was, she did not fully comprehend until salvation had come. At first she had feared the sadhu; but later the dread of the river dominated all other fears. The quiet, insidious giant with its luring moonlit charms was full of menace. Inch by inch it would have drawn nearer until it had gathered her into its arms in a deadly embrace. It was horrible to think of it. No wonder the natives ascribed its treachery to the work of an evil spirit.

Stumbling over the rough rock she followed Basildon towards the pier. The water lapped and bubbled softly as it devoured the margin of the island and contracted the narrow ridge with each passing minute.

"Is there any fear of our being cut off?" she asked, as they crossed a neck of rock not more than three feet wide.

"No; it is all right. Be careful where you tread and use your stick."

Another five minutes would have brought them to the pier; and ten minutes later they might have hoped to land on the opposite bank. Suddenly Basildon stopped. He had asked no questions as to the reason of her presence on the island at that time of night; nor how she came to have the child with her. All his attention and her strength and breath were required to cover the distance between them and the ferry-boat in the shortest possible time.

"What is it?" asked Margery.

"Listen!"

A roar, louder than the first she had heard that heralded the gush of water which drove her to the temple island, fell on their ears. It was like a distant hurricane among trees.

"Run! There is no time to be lost!"

Basildon took her by the arm, and together they

scudded towards the pier. He silently thanked Heaven that he had to deal with a resourceful colonial girl and not a bundle of nerves. He guided her to the foot of the bamboo ladder lashed to the scaffolding.

"Up! up you go! quick!"

The rungs were far apart and not very even; but she mounted them without a word of fear or protest.

"Don't look down!" said Basildon close behind her. "Keep your eyes fixed on the scaffolding above. Take care how you pass on to the second ladder. Yes, it is quite secure; it is lashed to the first. That's right! Now on to the third."

The noise of the coming wave increased; it sounded all round her and filled her ears. The night was absolutely calm, without a cloud in the sky except for the bank of mist resting on the distant mountains. She thought she heard above the wash faint, inarticulate cries below, the agonized bleat of a goat and the half-choked bellow of a buffalo; but she dared not disobey the man behind her and satisfy her awed curiosity by looking down. Resolutely she kept her eyes upwards till she reached the end of the fourth ladder which rested against the top of the pier. The bamboos that formed the last ladder projected five feet above the pier, but the rungs ended flush with the top of the masonry.

"Go on," said Basildon. "Keep tight hold of the sides of the ladder and climb to the last rung. Then pass through the uprights and step down off the ladder on to the matting that covers the masonry. You will find a drop of about two feet on to a level platform. Go gently. Ah! that's right! Thank God! you are safe!" he cried as he followed her and stood by her side. "You are a brave woman." He passed his arm through hers. "Now look down, and you will see what we have escaped."

She did so with an exclamation of astonishment. The ridge of rock was gone. Nothing of the island remained but the rock-hewn temple, which was partially submerged. Every other island with the pools and rivulets had disappeared, and a great sheet of water was spread out from right to left.

The roar died away as it had come, and the bore pushed its way down the river below the bridge. It was a veritable transformation scene as the silvery sheet expanded till it touched each bank. The river she had so ardently desired to see lay revealed in all its majesty before her eyes, awake and palpitating with a vitality that extended from the centre of the eddying current to the remotest inlet on the distant bank.

Her heart beat wildly as she thought of the narrowness of her escape. If Basildon had not heard her call and come to her rescue at once, nothing could have saved her. She must have been caught by that wall of rolling water, a sacrifice with the child to the river-god. Lifeless and battered, their bodies would have been tossed with those of other victims upon the mud banks of the delta below. If, on the other hand, they had embarked in the frail wicker-boat with its skin covering, they would have been overturned and swallowed up by the river.

"It was a close call!" she said in a low voice. Then turning to him she added, "Mr. Basildon, that's the second time you have saved my life."

He heard the unsteadiness of her voice and caught sight of the moisture in the eyes that were raised gratefully to his as she spoke. Afraid of himself he withdrew his arm and began to busy himself with the palm-leaf matting and rope. He placed the child in a sheltered corner and then set about making a seat for Margery and himself.

"Come and sit down, Miss Longford," he said presently. She was still watching the river. "I want to know how you reached the island and why you brought the child."

She was in no mood to talk of Sunnee. She had lost sight of his peril in the magnitude of her own.

"I can't yet, it is all so terrible, so unexpected—I mean all that is going on down there"

He could see that she was suffering from shock. Even he, accustomed as he was to the wild outbreaks of tropical nature, was stirred. The danger in which they had been placed was for the moment extreme.

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A delay here or lingering there would have been fatal to the incoming.

A bird flying overhead called to it with a loud cry, while from the water came the cry of some other bird, and a small cat got asleep. The woman sat there motionless, and came to the river, and the boat was still there.

"Mr. Basilio, I am pretty well, but I am not at all strong, coming close to me. Wait a little."

"A little, probably. The flood will carry many victims."

They were facing down-stream where the river was illuminated by the moon.

"How high will the water rise?"

"I can't say, nor can I tell. All we know is that exceptionally heavy showers have fallen in the hills."

"Look! what is that dark spot on the water to the left?"

"I'm afraid it is the ferry-boat. I thought the wave would be too strong for it. However, it is no great loss. It would have been too small to carry us across the river. The fishermen will have to bring a larger and stronger boat to rescue us."

"How soon will they come?"

"Not until day light, I fear."

She looked up at him in sudden consternation. Spending the whole night on the top of the pier was a dilemma which had not hitherto presented itself to her mind.

"Daylight!" she repeated. "Shall we have to stay here till to-morrow morning?"

"There is no alternative, I will make you as comfortable as I can, and you will have to be patient. Thank God, we are perfectly safe up here, where we should not have been if we had been caught in the temple. All you have to face is the possibility of going without your breakfast, for I doubt if we shall get ashore till midday."

She was silent for a time; and she allowed Basilio to arrange the seat he had improvised so as to give her a comfortable position. Then he busied himself with the mats and formed a shelter such as the watchman

might have constructed for himself. He was interrupted by Margery.

"Say! Mr. Basildon; can't we call to the villagers and get them to fetch us away to-night?"

"I'm sorry, but it's impossible. Our shouts if heard at all would be put down to the devil. Even if they recognized that we were only ordinary human beings in distress, they could not help us. The boldest of the fishermen would not dare to cross over to the pier with the flood still rising. By the morning the water will be going down, if it follows its usual custom; and then we may hope to be rescued."

He lifted the boy and laid him down at her feet.

"Poor little boy!" she said stooping over the child; and she told him how she found Sunnee.

"So that was what the old sadhu was after! a human sacrifice!" said Basildon when she had finished. "I was afraid something of the kind was brewing. What a mess I have made of that tree business! I'm not sure that we ought not to have cut it down in the ordinary way. It was a mistake to try to conciliate the people. I am afraid I made a mistake."

"I don't see that you are to blame," said Margery. "The man who is at the bottom of all the mischief is that grafter with the shifty eyes. If the tree had been cut down he would have engineered a very ugly riot. I am convinced that he is in the pay of the Germans."

"I know he is; and the police are aware of the fact. I owe him something on my own account and I will be even with him some day."

She saw his face darken, and she felt that she had been unwise to mention the subject.

"He wronged you cruelly—but don't let us talk about him. Tell me about your work. Is this river the largest in South India?"

"The Cauvery that runs past Trichinopoly is bigger. Its flood comes down just like this, quite suddenly. I've known——"

He did not finish his sentence. A distant cry from the direction of the temple fell on their ears.

"Hark! there's another poor creature drowning!" exclaimed Margery.

The cry was repeated and Basilton recognized a human voice. He rose from his seat by her side and went to the edge of the pier. The call was in Tamil; a washerman, he concluded, whom the water had found asleep by the pool, where he had washed his bundle of clothes and spread them to dry on the sand. The man was probably swimming down the stream supported by a log of wood or an inflated water skin.

Basilton uncoiled a strand of rope and laid it nandy to throw to the drifting man, in case he might be able to make the pier and save himself in the scaffolding. He fastened one end to the ladder posts, and only waited till he could catch sight of the swimmer. The scaffolding still stood firm; and as far as he knew the ladder remained in position.

A dark object came floating down the stream. It was a coracle, larger and stronger than the ferry boat; but it had suffered in its wild, rough journey and was in a sinking condition from having been in many collisions. A man sat in the coracle up to his waist in water. He had no punting pole, but was at the mercy of the current. The boat circled and swayed as though it were on the point of foundering. By great good luck it drifted straight towards the pier.

Margery had risen also and had come to Basilton's side.

"It's a man!" she said in a low voice as she gazed down with fascinated eyes.

"Yes; God only knows if we can save him. The boat can't swim much longer."

The coracle came on with a swing and was dashed against the scaffolding poles. In another moment its occupant was thrown into the water. He was a vigorous swimmer and reached the strong bamboo rights with a few strokes. The strength of the current, however, swept him away from the ladders, and left him clinging to the scaffolding on the other side of the pier. The light of the moon fell full upon him. Twining his limbs round the woodwork, he drew himself into the

backwater formed by the pier. It was a refuge which he was not allowed to possess alone. A rat and a couple of bandicoots beat the water in vain attempts to obtain a foothold on the wet wood. He had seen Basildon.

"Have you a rope up there?" he asked in Tamil, as he blew the water from his mouth and nostrils.

The voice was familiar; but Basildon did not recognize it immediately.

"Yes," he shouted back. "Hold tight and I will let it down."

He began to pry out the rope over the edge of the masonry while the swimmer clung to the wet poles.

"Be quick! the stream is strong and the water is full of vile beasts," cried the voice below.

Margery had been staring down for some seconds.

"Mr. Basildon! it's that gaster! the mahunt!"

Basildon stopped abruptly and the rope hung motionless some six feet above the man's head.

"Are you sure? yes! it is! By Heaven, he shall drown where he is! I will not stir a finger to save him!" he cried as a cloud of black revenge extinguished every spark of pity.

"Drop the rope to the man at once," commanded Margery. "You can't let him drown. It would be murder."

"He did his best to murder me," Basildon replied, fiercely.

"Help me! help me! I am drowning!" came from below in English. The mahunt had recognized Basildon.

"No, I won't! It is my turn now. I'll watch you drown by inches, you black murdering villain!"

"Mr. Basildon, give me the rope. You are mad. You will have that man's blood upon your hands if you don't help him!"

She snatched the rope from him and lowered it as she spoke. Basildon seized his lathee and swung it over his shoulder.

"Damn him! Let him die, the wicked devil!" he cried, beside himself with rage.

"Where is your Christianity? where is your

humanity? Oh, rely on your own will to save him. If you let him drown before your eyes. Mr. B. she said, in a voice that penetrated the gloomy mood that had befallen him. "For the sake of your own soul, for the sake of our friendship, help him to save him."

The appeal was not in vain. In a moment, under the spell, he let the lifeline fall and held it out to the drowning man. Together they guided it along the edge of the pool until it hung directly over the struggling man. The drowning man caught at it with his hands and feet, and the end round his waist.

The whirling stream had carried off one of the bandicoot; but it had brought a new-comer in the shape of a full-grown jackal. The animal swam strongly, and was master of its movements in the water. It made straight for the man and it managed to mount upon his back. Suiya beat it with the stick, but it snarled and snapped at the hand that struck it.

"Tell him to fasten the rope round his waist if he can manage it; then we might pull him to a better place," said Margery.

Barndon did as he was told. He let the rope go and gave the necessary instructions; but the man did not hear. He was once more fighting the jackal. It had succeeded in reaching him again, and in its attempt to clamber on to Suiya's back, it had caught its claws in the long lock of hair that descended from the crown of his shaven head. The weight of the head bore down his head, and he had a difficulty in keeping his mouth and nostrils above the water.

Margery and Barndon looked down at the battle in the water in a paralyzed silence. They could do nothing to render any assistance except by making the rope secure in such a manner as to prevent the man being drawn back into the current.

With one hand Suiya held the rope, with the other he tried to disentangle the claws from his sodden hair. The jackal resisted his endeavours. It bit and struggled and fought for its life. Inch by inch it dragged itself further towards his shoulder till it succeeded in getting



its forefeet hooked over the shoulders of the drowning man.

Nothing but his grip upon the rope kept the mahunt's head above water. In the struggle man and jackal swayed to and fro in the eddies of the backwater. Once or twice the edge of the current caught Suriya's legs, and the strain on the arm that held the rope was almost beyond his strength. With a supreme effort he dragged himself back nearer to the pier.

"Catch hold of the rope with both hands," shouted Basildon; "and climb out of the water."

The mahunt looked up at them despairingly, but he made an effort to follow the advice. Clinging to the rope, he lifted himself a little way out of the water. As he emerged the weight of the jackal increased. It bore him down, and the rope slipped through his weakening fingers. He turned on his back and the animal fell off, but its claws were still entangled in his hair. It struggled frantically to free itself, snarling, choking, and snapping; and in its efforts it drew the mahunt's head constantly beneath the water.

The bandicoot that was left drifted against him and crawled on to his chest, and the rat followed. The writhing group circled round and touched the racing stream. A stifled cry, and the mahunt with his terrible companions disappeared below the silvery ripples of the whirling current.

"How horrible! how dreadful!" gasped Margery, as she covered her eyes and staggered blindly from the edge of the pier, weak and faint with horror.

Basildon put a protecting arm round her, and led her to the seat he had made. Instead of withdrawing from his arm, she clung to him, shivering with terror. He held her close, with words of comfort and courage.

A distant shriek came over the water. It was the dying scream of the drowning man, as the current tossed him to the surface for the last time. He was separated at last from his terrible companion, but past all hope of salvation in that wide stretch of waters. Margery understood its meaning; and her head nestled down upon Basildon's breast with a little moan.

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"Poor man! poor man!" she cried, in a voice that was unsteady with sudden tears. She forgot her own wickedness in her pity for him. "Can nothing be done to save him?"

"Nothing," replied Basil den gravely. "Thanks to God and to my guardian angel, his blood does not rest upon my hands."

## CHAPTER XXVII

WARRADAILE drove over in the early morning to the camp. He was anxious to have a quiet talk with Margery before she went away. He felt that the little difference between them had somehow clouded the atmosphere. It was not a quarrel, his sensitive fastidious nature revolted against anything like an open breach. Even the shadow of an estrangement was disturbing. Margery had parted with him in unexceptional friendliness when he left her in camp; yet for all that he had been conscious of a rift. Perhaps it was the memory of their disagreement over Margery's journey to Madras and her visit to Caivalho. There ought not to be the shadow of a difference between them, a fact she would be wise to bear in mind. He came to the conclusion that if he could have an hour's uninterrupted talk, he might master the situation, and place matters on a satisfactory footing.

He had not slept well and was up before the dawn showed its pale light behind the mango trees of his garden. The lamps of his car required lighting before the start. Half an hour later, when the first golden rays of the sun shot upwards in the sky, he was able to extinguish them.

The drive was refreshing. The cool air blew the cobwebs from his brain; and his anxiety over the perfect accord between himself and Margery vanished. He made up his mind to meet her half-way and withdraw all opposition to her projected visit to Madras.

This was rendered comparatively easy by the thought of a letter he had written over-night. It was to the man he had mentioned as being likely to prove of service to her. To him he had fully explained what was

required. Miss Longford was to be left to make her own arrangements as she chose. He was to accompany her and be present at the interview, to safeguard her against incivility from ignorant native clerks and assistants, who might not understand that she was the principal and senior partner in the firm; and in her professional commercial travels.

Warradaile was confident that he had thus got rid of all difficulties, and there would be no danger of his future wife being misunderstood or subjected to other misbehaviour. In these days women were playing a number of rôles; and if she chose to enter the list of commercial travellers, there was no reason why she should not please herself. He had read that women in England were taking up all sorts of strange occupations, women with means as well as those who were obliged to earn their living. They were acting as motor drivers, carriers, van-men and ticket collectors on the railways. They were donning the workman's apron in a number of manufactories, and were driving the reaper and hay-rake over the fields. Miss Longford was embarking on a far less arduous task in trying, personally to enlarge her trade and secure a wider field for her manufactures.

Warradaile possessed the pen of a ready writer; and if he did nothing else he succeeded by his letter to Madras in convincing himself that he need make no further objection. He was to refuse proposed to send her on her journey and wish her good luck. He attended to treat the matter as a good joke and chaffed her on her keenness for making money.

He arrived at the camp in the best of humours and was startled to find it in an uproar. Groups of villagers stood about at a respectful distance from the tents talking excitedly. No one was listening, but that fact appeared of no consequence to any one. They roared away presently in the direction of the river, several of the servants following.

Warradaile sounded his hooter to announce his arrival and got down from the car. He walked towards the tents expecting to see Margery or Mrs. Enville emerge with the usual welcome. He entered the big

tent where one of the table servants was occupied in putting away some knives that he had cleaned.

"Where is your master?" asked Warradaile.

"Gone to the river, sir."

"And the big mistress; has she gone too?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Where is Miss Longford?"

"Done gone away to 'Merica, sir. Overseer Basildon gone away too," replied the man in the same unemotional voice.

"What!" thundered Warradaile in a voice that made the matey jump and retreat foot by foot until he reached the side entrance of the tent

"I go call butler, sir," he said as he vanished out of sight.

Warradaile turned and strode towards Mrs. Enville's tent. On the way he encountered Yann. The old ayah's grey head was towelled and her eyes were swollen with weeping.

"Ayah! what has happened in camp, and where is your mistress?"

"Ah! bah!" she replied incoherently. "Aiyoh! bad luck has fallen on us; and it is all through meddling with the devil-stone Aiyoh! aiyoh!" and the tears recommenced.

"Where's Miss Longford? Can't you tell me where she is?" he asked, losing his patience.

"Gone away, sir! gone back to 'Merica I thinking; yemmah! yemmah! and taken the child with her! aiyoh!"

She wept aloud and threw the end of her saree over her face. It was useless to hope for a lucid explanation from the old woman and he left her, continuing his way to Mrs. Enville's tent.

"Mrs. Enville! are you there?" he asked at the curtained entrance.

A broken voice invited him to come in. He hesitated, and the invitation was repeated in a tone of entreaty that took him inside at once.

He found Josie, the picture of misery, lying on her cot. She was dressed, but unable to sit up by reason of

a violent headache, the result of packing the day before and the fright she had sustained that morning. The news of Margery's absence had been brought at sunrise when Mary—so Yann had said—taking in the early tea, had found the bed unoccupied and her mistress gone.

Mary might have shed a little light on the mystery if she had chosen to say all she knew, but she was silent. She feared the wrath of husband and mother too much even at this crisis to speak. To her mind it was that she had seen Miss Longford the evening before on the top of the river bank, and that she had perceived her to go down to the water in search of Sunnee, would have led the way to a string of questions, the answering of which would have hopelessly implicated herself. So she maintained a tearful silence, and took refuge in sobs and moans, whenever a chance enquiry was put by fellow servant or by her distracted husband and mother.

Josic, who had been crying, glanced at Warradahl with frightened eyes as he entered. She, too, dreaded the close catechism that must ensue as soon as he had heard the disturbing news. In a way she felt responsible for Margery's conduct, and it was possible Warradahl might blame her for leaving the girl to herself after dinner the evening before.

"What is the matter, Mrs. Eynell? and where is Margery?" he asked, controlling the impatience which was increasing each minute that passed.

"We don't know; she is missing. My husband is making inquiries. She paused, and then gathering up her courage for the next piece of news, which could not be suppressed, she added: "The Overseer is missing also. We cannot guess what has happened to them both."

"You don't mean to imply that Margery and Basildon have—have——" He could not frame the words. The idea was too preposterous to be entertained for a moment.

"No, no, of course not!" she answered hastily, although the thought had presented itself to her mind more than once and been dismissed. "Another dreadful thing has happened in the village. The

river rose last night with one of those sudden freshets, and it has carried away the bank with the amma's tree and the devil-stone. The village is in an uproar. They say that the river god was displeased with the new tree chosen for the amma; and he has taken the matter into his own hands, and carried his wife off to some other place. They were doing poojah to the amma up to eleven o'clock last night; then they went home. The breaking away of the river bank must have happened very soon afterwards when the flood was at its height. Since then the waters have been subsiding."

Warradaile listened with ill-concealed impatience. He cared little about the village deity. What he wanted to know was what had become of Margery.

"The ayah told me just now that Miss Longford had gone back to America and had carried off the child with her. What did she mean? What child was she alluding to?"

"Her own grandson. The boy is also missing. Margery was very fond of him and he of her; but of course it is absurd to say that she has stolen him! These people get hold of the most outrageous notions."

"Has Margery taken any luggage with her?"

"I don't think so. My head aches too much for me to get up and examine her tent. Perhaps you wouldn't mind going and seeing for yourself, if she has left any sign of her intentions."

Here Daffie ran into the tent full of excitement.

"Mother! mother! the cook's boy says——"

"Daffie! how often I have forbidden you to talk to the servants!"

"I haven't been talking, mummie dear—indeed I haven't! I've only been listening!" cried Daffie in an aggrieved tone.

"Take Mr. Warradaile to Margery's tent; and, Daffie! see if you can find a letter on her dressing-table."

They went off together, and Josie closed her eyes with mingled feelings of relief and annoyance. She pitied herself profoundly, and felt some resentment

against Margery for placing her in such an uncomfortable position. She regretted continually that she was not safe at Bangalore, out of the hurly-burly of the camp-life with the devil-worship, the flood, and the ever-dreaded cholera. She was also annoyed with the ayah. Like all natives, Yann had gone to pieces entirely under her trial, and she was useless as lady's maid or nurse. Instead of commiserating with the sorrowing grandmother, she blamed her and Mary for their carelessness. As far as the old ayah was concerned the accusation was unjust. Every minute of her time had been given to her mistress and Daffie. In her resentment at the injustice, Yann had passed on the scolding with interest to her daughter, emphasizing her words with the bony finger-joints of her closed fist. Mary protested and cried; and what little sense remained under the burden of her secret was driven away.

Warradaile and Daffie entered Margery's tent. It was deserted. The bed with its mosquito-curtains was untouched, and just as Mary had left it the day before. Warradaile walked at once to the dressing-table. He glanced at it with some diffidence. Somehow he felt that he could not lay a desecrating hand on things that were sacred to her use. Daffie had no such scruples.

"Look at Margery's lovely glass!" she said, lifting up with difficulty a folding mirror. "You can see all round your head with it, like magic."

"Put it down, Daffie. We mustn't touch anything; we may only look."

His eyes swept over the tent closely; but he saw nothing that gave a clue to her disappearance. Her luggage stood by the canvas wall ready for the journey; her dressing-gown hung over a chair; and her slippers were placed near for her use when she should need them. The more he examined the tent, the more convinced he became that her absence was not premeditated but accidental.

Suddenly a suggestion occurred to his mind that was appalling. Was it possible that she could have gone for a moonlight stroll by the river and fallen in by any chance?



"Daffie, go back to your mother. I must find your father at once."

"He has gone to see the amma's tree. The cook's boy says——"

"Run away, dear; I can't stop to listen."

Disappointed a second time of telling her wonderful story, the child went to find Yann who under ordinary circumstances would listen when no one else would do so, and the old ayah was always sympathetic enough to appear astonished and pleased as well as credulous, no matter how extraordinary the story might be.

Warradaile hurried towards the village and turned down the road that led to the river. He found Envile standing by a breach in the bank. The water had cut away a slice with a clean cut, and the tree and stone were gone. A gang of villagers under the direction of the watchman were moving the soil where a small landslide seemed probable.

"Here's a nice mess for us to be in!" said Envile, as Warradaile came up.

"Better before than after you had completed the bridge. On the whole you ought to be pleased. It solves the difficulty of the tree. But never mind about that. What I am trying to discover is the mystery of Margery's disappearance. Can you help me and tell me where she is?"

"She's all right; she's over there"; and Envile pointed to the pier standing tower-like in the river, with the stream sweeping heavily down on either side.

Warradaile gazed across, too astounded to speak. It was difficult to believe that his ears had heard correctly. Envile recognized the unbelief written on his face, and handed him his glasses.

"Here, take these, and you will see her and Basildon quite distinctly on the top of the pier."

"How in Heaven's name did she—did they get there?" he asked at length.

"That's more than I can tell you."

He put the glasses to his eyes again. Margery was seated. Basildon stood near her. He was busy coiling and arranging some rope.

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"What have they got with them?"

"A child; I think it is the ayah's child, but I can't tell for certain."

"Yes, sir," said Neliappa, with a happy grin on his face that spread from ear to ear. "I know what's Missy's child. Missie very fond of that boy."

The peon had no thought of going to see his wife and mother-in-law of Sannee's wife. Not for one moment would he lose sight of his son until he was safely rescued and brought to land.

Warradaile's mind was in a curious state of confusion and bewilderment. He had refused to entertain the thought that Margery had eloped with the Overseer. Yet the evidence of his own eyes told him, that though they had not gone away from the place, they had undoubtedly been in close companionship all night. It was probably the accidental and unforeseen sequel to a long evening walk together on the sands. They had been sitting there talking, and had been caught by the flood. How could it have happened otherwise? It had been one of those alluring moonlit nights which always had an attraction for Margery. What but one had she——? He checked himself. This was not the moment to give way to his just anger and indignation—that must come later. It would require a very full explanation to satisfy him on the subject. If Margery was unable to give it, then there must be at once to everything between them. Again he put the field-glasses to his eyes and watched the couple. Meanwhile Envile continued to talk.

"I've sent for a big river-boat, such as they use when the river is full to carry down palm-leaf. Thank God, the flood is subsiding. How long it will continue to fall I don't know. It may rise again to-night or to-morrow, or a week hence. There is no actual danger in their present position. The difficulty will be when they have to get into the boat. The ladders don't seem to have been washed away; but Basilson is there, and he will see that every precaution against danger is taken."

Danger, indeed! thought Warradaile, as he saw

Basildon return to Margery after he had finished arranging the rope, and sink down by her side on to the seat. The two were apparently deep in conversation, too deep to pay any attention to what was going on on shore. They both leaned over the child, who was kneeling with folded hands in front of Margery.

Poor Sunnee! he was repeating his grace in the vain hope of receiving food. His prayers had been said more than once to Margery. Now and then the mouth took a downward curve and the tears brimmed over; but with the patience of his race he resigned himself to the inevitable, never relinquishing hope that a meal would follow grace if he only waited long enough.

Warradaile saw Margery lean forward to take up the kneeling child. Basildon forestalled her; he lifted Sunnee and placed him on her lap. The boy snuggled down into her arms, and Basildon arranged the cloak so as to cover his little limbs. The effect of the narcotic still remained, and the child closed his eyes and forgot his hunger in sleep.

Then Basildon rose and moved some of the palm-leaf mats, so that they should shade her and the boy more effectually from the sun, which was shining down upon the great river from a cloudless sky with increasing power.

Warradaile handed the glasses back to Enville with an impatient movement. He had seen enough, more than enough. Margery and Basildon had the appearance of being on the best of terms and absorbed in each other, to the exclusion of the rest of the world, himself included. Never once had she stood up and looked towards the shore, as though she longed for their rescuers to come. She was content to be there as long as she had Basildon with her; and he, Warradaile, was forgotten.

It was unreasonable; but the jealousy that is latent in man's nature was aroused; it was as blood in his eyes, blinding him to the true facts of the case. If Enville had been asked his opinion, he would have said that Margery was behaving heroically in not losing

her presence of mind, and in consequence of this, under the increasing pages of his journal, his work was altogether commended. His own labours had been in mysteries by far, and he had not been himself in such a trying position.

As they stood together, the sun came forth, and up and saluted.

"Sir, sir!" he cried, addressing himself to the worm permission to speak to him now.

"Say on; what is it?" replied the Engineer.

"The amma's tree! it has been found!"

"The amma's tree! where?" asked Envile with a contraction of the eyebrows. He had been devoutly hoping that this bone of contention had been removed for ever.

"Below the village where the river bed is dry to the south, sir."

"Thank goodness, they can't see the tree!" said Envile in English to Warradale. "What have you done with it?" he asked in Tamil.

"We have not dared to touch it. It is not done. The swami—the mahunt—is here."

"The mahunt! He is wanted by the police, he mustn't be allowed to escape."

Envile started off in some excitement, a man following close behind and continuing to talk. Warradale walked by Envile's side.

"He will not escape, sir, he is dead. He has been caught by the amma in the fork of the tree. The sadhu is there. He says that she has taken out in place of the buffalo, which did not please her; and that now she is satisfied, and all will be well with us. The flood began to fall from the time the tree came a-bore; for it lies on the high-water mark. Master will see for himself that I have spoken the truth."

A quarter of a mile below where the band came, they found the tree and the dead man. The sadhu was in charge, a bundle of tattered streamers and trumpery than ever. He was calling to the whole village to come and see the wonderful thing that had happened. A

human sacrifice had been offered by the river demon to his wife, setting at defiance every Government enactment and the whole body of the police.

Enville and his companion stood at a little distance and looked on at the strange sight. The sadhu proceeded to do poojah, pouring oil on the inanimate body and sodden tree. Then at a signal a body of villagers came forward with their country spades, and dug away the mud that held up the tree.

"See how the amma has bitten him and drunk his blood," whispered one woman to another as the red lines made by the jackal's teeth were exposed.

"Who can control the gods and lay down their limits? They take what they want and we their servants can only give. If we refuse they punish."

The soil having been removed the water began to do its work. The tree glided down the sloping mud and was once more set afloat with its hideous burden. The weight of the dead body bore it downwards beneath the surface of the current and it disappeared from sight.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

THE water subsided as rapidly as it had arisen. Although it did not reach its original low level, it went down sufficiently to leave a number of islands and pools, among them the island on which stood the temple of the river god. On both sides of the river were wet glistening banks of mud, where flocks of birds dipped their beaks deep down into the soft ooze. Thousands of earthen pots and tanks carried off the water and poured it lavishly upon miles of broad flat acres. The parched sun-baked land, its stretches of fields and its groves of palm-trees, drank up the flood with an insatiable thirst; and waited—steaming with sudden fertility—for another supply.

The villagers were impatient to be off with their ploughs and cattle to prepare the warm mud for the seed; but they could not tear themselves away until the rescue had been effected. Not a word was said on the subject that was in every man's mind. Each one, old and young, knew that the sadhu had offered a second sacrifice in the name of the people and it had been rejected. A first-born male child had been chosen, and he had proved no more acceptable than the buffalo. Then the river deity had acted for himself. He had selected a caste man, drawn him to the river bed where he strove to elude the police; the demon had trapped him by the aid of the river and had drunk his blood—a sure sign of acceptance. The people had seen it with their own eyes; and it needed not the sadhu to tell them that the spirit of the flood was satisfied. They might go to their fields with minds at rest. Disaster would not now overtake them.

Though relieved at the solution of the trouble, they

were not without awe, as they contemplated the powerful working of the demon's will and the magnitude of the sacrifice. The victim was not only a caste man but a person of standing, belonging to a far more important temple than that in the river bed. Krishna himself, had he demanded a human sacrifice could not have expected more. It showed how great was the river god.

They watched Yann closely as she received the rejected offering from Basildon's arms. Not a scratch was visible on his beautiful little body. He was sound in skin and limb. All that ailed him was the natural hunger common to every healthy child who had fasted beyond the usual time. Glances were exchanged, and here and there a whispered word, but nothing more. To every one was known the terms employed by the police in these days for religious acts of the kind. "Murder" was not a pleasant accusation to have hovering over a village.

Yann nearly slipped off the muddy bank in her eagerness to clasp the boy in her arms when the boat touched the shore. Seeing his grannie he at once associated her with hot coffee and rice cakes, and began to repeat his grace; nor would he be silenced until his mouth was filled with a sweet honey-cake of the kind he loved which Yann had brought with her.

Warradaile and Enville were both on the river bank to greet Margery and congratulate her on her escape. They came forward to lend assistance; but Basildon was somehow in possession of the situation; and to him she turned for help as though she were only claiming her right. Warradaile scanned her face closely. Until her foot was firmly planted on the soil, she had no eyes for anyone but her companion of the long night.

As soon as she was ashore she withdrew her hand from Basildon's and turned to greet Enville and Warradaile with a smile that puzzled the latter. It denoted a mind confident and undisturbed. It was neither deprecatory nor confused at the compromising position into which she had been placed by the

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accident; nor was it self-accusing of carelessness or folly.

"Good morning!" she said cheerfully. "Here we are, quite safe and sound. I'm afraid I can't tell you some, Mr. Enville, by my advice this morning, but I could not help it. Your rice: all for nothing. It deceived me; lured me to it. I should have known it would drown me. It was a close call, I tell you." "Tell me," Mr. Basildon I am through with it safe. What I'm most interested in just this moment is to know if I had nothing to eat since last night, I'm content."

She walked on and began to climb the steep bank. The two men looked at her with curiosity as they followed. She might have just returned from an enjoyable picnic. Enville was thinking how very different Josie would have taken it; Warradale was wondering what the explanation would be.

Basildon dismissed the boatmen, paying them for their services. It delayed him a few minutes. He waited and the two men were soon in receipt of the message which they carried on in a low voice. The message hung round Yann and her daughter with the same close attendance. Having executed the duty of their parents to the camp, the people departed in haste to fetch their ploughs and cattle. Half an hour after every man who could be spared was tramping through the flooded fields ankle deep in mud, using the primitive wooden plough with its team of slow patient beasts, backwards and forwards; and casting the seed abroad behind it, as their ancestors had done a thousand years before them.

A gang of men, chafing at the restraint, were held back to repair the breach in the river bank as well as they could, and make it secure in case a second inundation took place before it could be properly encased with stone. They had already been some time at work under Enville's directions; but he was far from satisfied with the result. He dared not leave them lest they should take themselves off to their fields.

"I am very thankful that you are safe, Miss Gray," said Warradale, as he walked by her side to the camp.



"So am I; I thought my last hour had come when the river got busy and began to rise. I'll allow that your river is great, and I shall never forget it. I thought our rivers of the Rockies took the prize against the world; but I'm not so sure that this grafter doesn't beat them all hollow. How hungry I am!" she concluded inconsequently.

"I ought to have brought you something to eat; Enville and I went back to camp for breakfast after we discovered that you were safe. How stupid of me!" said Warradaile in self-reproach.

"Not at all! I couldn't have touched any food out here."

"How was it that you—you—that the river——"

It was difficult to put his question into words. The thought of forcing a confession from her by means of catechising was not at all to his mind. The explanation which was his due should be spontaneous. She answered him readily enough and without any show of embarrassment.

"I crossed over the stepping-stones and took a walk on the sands without a suspicion of danger. When I got back to the stream the river had risen and covered the stones so that I couldn't see them. Then just as we hoped to escape by the ferryboat, a great wave of water came down and swept it away. Luckily we were close to the pier, and were able to climb up by the ladders; otherwise we must have been drowned. It was a close call, a vurry close call," she concluded, unconsciously lapsing into her American speech.

The last words came slowly and with increasing gravity; and they were followed by a silence that Warradaile did not care to break. She had indirectly given him the information he wanted; and he could not doubt but that she had been for a moonlight walk with Enville's Overscer. They must have ventured some distance away, and been too much absorbed in each other to notice the vagaries of the river. It was a humiliating thought that she, his promised wife, should be out alone with Basildon at that hour. He would not go so far as to accuse her of any unbecoming conduct;

but a moonlight walk with a man in Basildon's position, whatever it might be from an American point of view, was not in accordance with the English sense of propriety. The more he thought of it, the more uncomfortable he felt. Other questions suggested themselves to his mind. Was it the first walk of the kind she had taken with the man? No; while his guest at Malra had she not walked home with Basildon from Carvalho's house? and she had shown no sense of having acted against the conventions in so doing. Had there been anything more than a slight acquaintance between them on board ship? He recalled the fact that they were fellow-travellers; they had crossed over to Tuticorin together; and Basildon had driven her to Sinaloor when the car had failed to put in an appearance.

It was just as well that the distance to the camp was short. He was fast working himself up into a state of repressed irritation, which undermined the self-control he prided himself on possessing. At any moment he felt that he might have been tempted to say more than he intended.

On arriving at the camp, Margery turned into her tent with an off-hand farewell.

"See you again at tea," she said as she disappeared behind the purdah. When Josie rushed up to the tent a little later to ask a score of questions, she was met by Mary, smiling and happy once more, with the information that Missie was dressing and could not speak to her. Mrs. Enville was obliged to wait until the tea came before her curiosity was satisfied.

Enville did not turn up to lunch; and Josie with her little daughter sat down with Warradaile alone. They were still ignorant of the full story of Margery's escapade. By that time Warradaile had decided to allow Margery to take her own chosen line; and to make no attempt to cross-question and examine. If she wished to clear up matters and explain how it was that she found herself in such a peculiar position, he would gladly listen to her assurances that it was an accidental meeting and accept her explanation. If on the other hand she maintained her reserve, then he

should consider himself free to put his own construction on what had occurred and act accordingly.

Margery reappeared at four o'clock. The tea had been set out under the shade of the trees. Josie was already seated before the tray with Daffie by her side. Warradaile, called by the servant from the big tent where he had been reading, joined them and sat down in his usual place next to Margery. She was in the best of spirits apparently.

"I enjoyed my late breakfast enormously. So glad to have it in my tent," she said. "I was positively famished; and it was just as well that I took it in private, so that you could not see how I devoured the good things sent in. Then I went to sleep; and now I feel fit for anything. Say! Josie, I'm thinking I'll come with you to Bangalore right now. Madras will do later."

"I've wired for a room for you at Madras," remarked Warradaile, who having made arrangements always disliked any upsetting of them.

"I'll wire that I'm not coming," said Margery, undisturbed.

"Tell me all about your adventures," said Josie. "I'm dying to hear how you got into that extraordinary position on the top of the pier—the very last place we thought of looking for you. And how was it that Overseer Basildon was with you?"

"I'll allow that I have to thank him a second time for saving my life. I must begin at the beginning, and tell you right away all about it."

She related her story lightly, and with many touches of her American tongue. She had been wild to see the river, she said; and lured by the beauty of the night, she had crossed the stepping-stones and wandered as far as the temple. There, to her great surprise, she had found Sunnee asleep. She said nothing of the child being drugged nor of the ominous position in which he had been placed.

She returned to the stepping-stones and described her unsuccessful search for them. She retraced her steps towards the temple and spoke of the strange

creatures that crossed her path as they fled from the waters. Then came the further rising of the flood, and she was driven to take refuge on the temple steps.

"As I sat there watching the water in the moonlight as it lapped up the rock and came closer and closer Josie, I suddenly remembered what you had told me about the river sometimes rising above the building. I was pretty well scared to death. I jumped up and shouted for all I was worth, hoping Mr. Enville would hear me. He didn't—or, if he did, he must have taken me for one of those devil-worshippers. Luckily Mr. Basildon heard my call; and he came over in the cockle-boat of a ferry to fetch me away."

Warradaile gave a little gasp of relief. He had judged her wrongly. It was not a prearranged meeting.

"And how was it that you didn't get over to this side?" asked Josie, who was inclined to believe that Margery had herself delayed the return by interfering unnecessarily on the way.

"Just as we were nearly up to the place where Mr. Basildon had left the boat while he came over to the temple to fetch me, there came another rush of water. He carried the child, and we just ran for our lives. Josie! if you had seen me go up those ladders, you would have screamed! I was pretty slick about it, I tell you! Mr. Basildon was close behind me, and he kept me hustling till I reached the top. When I looked down from the pier, the great river that I had been so wild to see was there. It had arrived. It was all I had heard of it and then some. The sleepy little stream that I had stepped across by the stones was gone; and in its place was a silver sheet of swirling water half a mile wide without a break in it. It was a sight that I shall never forget, and I'm not denying it."

Memories connected with the stream held her silent. Of those she could not speak. The sparkle died out of her speech, and a solemnity overshadowed her the solemnity of the tragedies which had overwhelmed man and beast.

"And then what happened?" asked Daffie, who had listened with widened eyes to the story. "Did you see

the amma and her husband come riding down on the river? You know the river ate up the amma's tree. The matey said that——"

"Then I sat down to rest," said Margery, addressing herself to Daffie and interrupting her. "Mr. Basildon made me the most lovely little hut out of palm-leaf mats; and Sunnee and I were able to get to sleep"

"I should like to sleep in a house like that," replied the child, envious for the moment of Sunnee's good luck. "Did Mr. Basildon make another house for himself?"

"Of course; and in the morning, when I awoke, the sun was just rising over the water. The river was like a big lake. It was a wonderful sight, even though it had gone down considerably, and a few islands were already showing."

"And did you see the amma?" asked Daffie, returning to the charge. "She was there, you know, riding on her own tree, which was washed away by the river. Her husband ordered it to be washed away, and she is to live in a tree higher up."

"I am glad the tree is gone; but I didn't see the amma. I don't believe there is an amma," replied Margery.

Daffie blinked her eyes wisely and shook her head.

"We have to say that we don't believe in the amma because we are Christians; but she was there. She rode on her own tree and carried away the sackerifice, which she ate; she was so hungry. The matey said they could see the marks——"

"Nonsense, Daffie!" interposed Josie, sharply. "Didn't you hear what Margery said; there is no amma?"

"Mummie dear, something ate the sackerifice!" protested Daffie in an aggrieved tone.

"It was an alligator."

"The matey said that the teeth-marks were like those of the amma's teeth. She has teeth like a dog. He wouldn't tell me what the sackerifice was. I said you would fine him if he didn't tell me, and he laughed. You will fine him, won't you, mummie dear?"

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The words came from her lips in a torrent that could not be checked. Margery was not sorry to have the attention of her two companions diverted. She had told her tale, and given them all the details she thought desirable. The rest did not concern them. She had not heard of the drifting a hole of the devil-tree with its terrible burden; and Daffie's allusion to the sufferings and the marks of the amma's teeth conveyed nothing to her mind of the sequel to the tragedy she had witnessed.

"Daffie, if you will put on your hat I will take you to see the river. It will be our last look at it," said Margery.

"May I come too?" asked Warradale.

"Certainly; we'll all go," she replied.

Josie excused herself; she would have been well pleased to think that she would never see the river or the village again. They had been the cause of much trouble and anxiety to her husband, and he was anxious to forget their very existence.

It was not so with Margery. To her the river had been true to its character of good and evil. It had brought terror in the darkness, and a threat of destruction and death. Then happiness that was like the radiant dawn rising over the water, had followed, for she and Basildon had had time and opportunity to come to a knowledge of themselves, and shape their future accordingly.

## CHAPTER XXIX

"HAVE some food, and come to me as soon as possible," said Envile, as he and Basildon reached the top of the bank. "Something must be done, or we shall lose half the village washed away at the next rising of the river. I'll wait here for you. I don't know how I can hold this gang of villagers together. They're too crazy to be off to their fields; and this isn't their fault. They don't seem to know how to handle it."

"I'll be with you in twenty minutes, sir," said Basildon, as he hurried away in the direction of the bungalow.

Basildon raced through a change of clothes, swallowed his breakfast as best he could. He had just finished when Nellappa appeared.

"The contractor wishes to see you, sir."

"What contractor?" Basildon asked, jumping up and hurrying out to the verandah. There, to his astonishment, he found the missing man, who had so basely deserted him on the night of the devil-dance. "Oh, it's you! What have you got to say for you after your disgraceful behaviour?"

"I've come back, sir," said the culprit, smiling broadly and without sign or token of shame.

"So I see; and I wonder you're not ashamed to show your face. If you've come for your money, you won't get it."

"I've come to finish the job, sir; and when the master is satisfied, he will give the cheque."

"Do you know what your confounded desertion of us at the critical moment has led to?" asked Basildon sternly.

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"Yes, sir, the anima's tree is gone," he said, smiling and unabashed. "No there is but to prevent the completion of the work," continued the contractor, with increasing satisfaction. "You see, it was of no use for me to sit down here and wait, while the tide stood in the way. My men were becoming impatient. So I took them all out to another job further south which my brother had arranged. I helped him to finish his; and now he is going to help me to finish mine."

"Have you got your coonies here?" asked Basilton, as he took up his hat and stick.

"Yes, sir; and my brother's as well. They can begin on the work at once, as soon as they have finished their midday meal."

"How did you know that the tree was removed? It only happened last night."

"I knew it because I heard that the water was coming down."

"I don't understand," said Basilton, as they left the bungalow.

The contractor's grin broadened still more, showing a fine set of teeth; and he proceeded to give an explanation of the mystery.

"Sir, you must please excuse. I know more of the ways of these people than your honour does. It was well that you should try to remove the tree as you thought fit. I feared that, through the mahunt's influence, whatever you did would not find favour with the people. I was also aware that the sadhu, who is nothing better than an ignorant village magician, working on the fears of the people for what he can get out of them, would do as the mahunt wished. You might have moved the stone half a dozen times, and it would have found its way back to the old spot. So, sir, I thought it best to make sure myself of the removal of the tree; for though the Government is a good paymaster, it is not in the habit of settling accounts until the work is properly finished. My people must live, and I have to advance them the money to buy food. If they do not receive their wages in full, where am I?"



"But it was the river that removed the tree. You had nothing to do with it."

"I beg pardon, sir. It was my doing that the river cleared away the obstruction. After all, the river with its strength is only our servant, controlled by banks and buncs, canals and tanks. Knowing that you would not be successful, I had certain tunnels bored in the bank. I told my men that they were for the piping to convey the drainage, and to save the bank being washed away. It is a common device with us when we wish to make a river change its course and there was no difficulty. The flood did its work ; it followed the course I marked out for it, and carried away the tree and the stone. The people believe that it is the river god's work and all are satisfied."

He regarded Basildon with supreme pride and self-congratulation.

"You beat me hollow in smartness, contractor, for you have solved the difficulty. Why didn't you tell me what you were about? You would have saved me endless anxiety."

"It was best that your honour should not know. You would not have consented. Half the village might have been washed away if the floods had risen higher ; and then you would have been blamed. Besides, the Indian gods do not work with the English ; the English already know too much ; and the gods are afraid lest the white man should become more powerful than themselves."

Basildon smiled as he replied :

"Perhaps you are right. You had better go at once and collect your men. We must see to the building up of the bank and make it safe. Who can tell how soon the river may rise again?"

"There is a break in the weather on the hills ; we shall have time to do all that is necessary, though we may not complete the bridge. We shall be able to work all night by the light of the moon, my brother and his gang relieving mine," he replied confidently.

The contractor left him, and Basildon went on to keep his appointment with his superior officer. Enville

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met him near the breach, he looked hurt and troubled.

"Those infernal villagers! They could go off to their fields; pretended that they had gone home to get their food, and made it an excuse to get away! What are we to do? The river bank has no more to stand in it than a sand dune, and we shall lose another large slice in the next flood."

"It's all right, sir. The contractor has come back and brought his gang with a second lot of men to help in pushing on the work. We shall be able to save the bank and keep the river within bounds."

He told the wonderful tale of how the contractor had engineered the whole affair and made it to give do what man could not.

"It's astounding in its simplicity and its daring. He was quite right in saying that we should not have consented. Why! the fellow risked the safety of the whole village! If the river had risen thirty feet instead of only ten last night, half the place would have been washed away. He would have gone scot-free; I should have been blamed by the Government, the people—those who were left—would have believed that it was the river god's doing, entirely."

"India is a land of risks," remarked Basilton.

"And the people with their fatalism know how to take them!"

Enville waited to see the work begun; and when he turned away to go back to camp for a late tea, he felt as if a load of trouble and anxiety, which had been weighing him down for some weeks past, was removed.

He found Margery and Duffie just starting for a walk with Warradale in attendance. They told him that they were going to see the river.

"It has gone down tremendously—hardly worth looking at," said Enville. There was a new note in his voice which caused his wife to glance at him in wonderment.

"No great harm done, Guy?" she said.

"None at all, my dear. On the contrary, it seems as though the river has been good enough to clear

Warradaile in difficulties for us, he answered almost joyously

"What do the people say to the washing away of the tree?" asked Warradaile.

"As far as I can make out, they are just as contented as I am. While the men are busy on their fields, the sadhu is to choose another tree, and set up a stone like the old one, which has of course disappeared. When the harvest is over it will be dedicated with the usual devil-dance. Thank heaven we shall not be here then, as I hope to have the bridge finished long before."

"The old grafter!" said Margery with a laugh as she walked away.

Warradaile would have been glad to have dispensed with the company of the child. Daffie was a person who, unlike Sunnee, could not be ignored. She monopolized the conversation, and Margery meekly submitted and allowed it to be so. It was hard on Warradaile, whose mood was softening. His mind was more at rest than it was; and he had reconciled himself to the fact that it was all an accident, and that he ought to be grateful to Basildon for what he had done. Still, some explanation was needed to clear the air. It should come from Margery; and might very well be accompanied by an expression of regret that she had been placed in such a strange position. He was more than ready to meet her half-way; the expectation of it kept him preoccupied and silent as they strolled along.

From the river bank they took the path leading to the spot where the tree once stood and which was now a broken earthwork. Men were swarming over it, leveling, terracing, battening and making large pools of cement ready for the huge blocks that were already in the embrace of the crane. Would they be in time? With the help of a tropical sun shining from a cloudless sky day by day, there was no reason why they should fail.

Basildon stood on the top of the bank watching the men. He lifted his hat as the party approached. Margery glanced at him, smiled and bowed. Warradaile could not help watching her. Would she stop and

# CHAPTER I LOVE BETWEEN INDIAN AND WHITE

“speak?” Would she thank the man who had saved her life? She passed slowly on after that, but he gave no sign.

In Warradaile's eyes it was a great part to pass him by. She should have talked with the Overseer and have repeated his words of great service he had rendered. It was a great service Warradaile an opportunity of expressing his gratitude also. He made a movement as though he would have spoken to Basiloon; but at that very moment the Overseer turned abruptly to the inspector and the two men went down the embankment together to the spot where the colonies like clusters of busy ants were puddling the cement.

The drive to the station had dinner was made in factory also. Mrs. Enville and Dr. Basiloon were in front in spite of Warradaile's efforts to get into the front seat. Margery with the two ayahs and a little Sunnee occupied the back seat. He had no other work at the station. Margery in some unaccountable way was never to be found again. John Jose or Daboo.

Mrs. Enville made constant requests to the driver. Was the luggage safe? and was he not to be seen? They were in the next compartment to the driver's. He kindly see because natives were so much liable on the faithful Nellappa, who was mounting guard over the baggage.

However much he might resent being made use of in this way, Warradaile could not do otherwise than comply. He went to the end of the platform and looked at the motley heap of luggage travelling in his name. It included several bundles, the personal effects of the ayahs. Crowning the pile that had a little station Margery's neat travelling trunk, was a large old weather-worn old fowl basket. From it protruded the lean ruffled necks of Vain's fowls. They kept the enforced journey in their confined quarters with patience, and surveyed the bustling world around them calmly and without fluster or heat. They were packed in so tightly that any jerking or jolting of the basket failed to upset their equilibrium. They were wise old

birds in their way, and sat tight in transit, seizing the opportunity of a stoppage, such as happened at the station, to rise cautiously to their feet in turn and stretch out a cramped leg or wing. Then settling back again they resigned themselves to another spell of nerve-racking jolts, as the basket was dumped down in the luggage van.

When he returned with the assurance that the personal belongings of the party were safe, he found Margery had taken her seat in the carriage. A little later farewells were said; and the words he longed for were never spoken.

As he sped back to the camp where he was to pass the night with Enville, he thought it all over again and again; and the more he contemplated the matter the more puzzled did he become. Why had Margery avoided speaking to Basildon? Why had he not looked disappointed at being passed by in that manner? An expression of gratitude from both Margery and himself was due to one who had performed so great a service to her as saving her life.

As he pondered over it a disturbing thought suddenly crossed his brain. What if she had already thanked him; and he was satisfied!

\* \* \* \* \*

Three months later Margery successfully carried out her mission and interviewed the heads of the big firms in the principal Indian cities. She did it on her honeymoon with Anthony Basildon, who proved an able coadjutor. At the end of six weeks she had enlarged the connection of the House of Longford beyond her highest expectations.

Nor was there any further talk of turning the firm into a Company. As managing partner Basildon found the work congenial and pleasant; and when the time came for Margery to be occupied with other cares than fruit canning, she was well content to leave the fortunes of the firm in such able hands as his.

Warradaile took his dismissal well, although he felt the rupture more than a little. He had been honestly in love with Margery, and was prepared to make

## CH XXIX] LOVE BY AN INDIAN RIVER 307

sacrifices; but at the bottom of his heart he acknowledged that it was inevitable, as he read and re-read her letter.

"I've made a mistake," she wrote. "The big princess to your prince is not my stant; it is best for me to quit it before it is too late. I'm sorry--some. But one day you will agree that I am right."

In less than a year he found himself fully at one with what she had written.

When she last heard of him he was engaged to an English girl, who was to the manner born, the daughter of a General commanding a Division. Margery wrote her warm congratulations and promptly despatched a case of canned fruits to him and a diamond ring to his bride as wedding presents. They were received in the friendly spirit in which they were sent. The bride's eyes sparkled at the sight of the beautiful diamonds, and when Warradaile said something in apology for the canned fruit that accompanied them, he recalled to the effect that in her eyes diamonds were acceptable under any circumstances, whether given away with a pound of tea or a gross of Californian apricots and peaches.

## THE END



share. "I must give the old man a present; I am so thankful not to be staying with him all night."

She placed a five-rupee note in his hand to his great satisfaction. The people who patronised his rickshaws usually made it less. The vehicle in which she was to finish her journey was nothing more than a light framework of bamboo holding two seats and a shelf behind on which their travelling-bags were strapped. Below the shelf was a step which the syce used as a seat. His weight balanced the cart and minimised the jolting caused by the long loping trot of the horse.

"What about my baggage?" she asked, as Basil don helped her to climb up into her seat.

"I have told my peon to put it with mine. He and the messenger who brought Mr. Enville's notes will come on in a bullock cart and get in to Siraloor by daylight. Are you quite comfortable?"

He took his place by her side; and the horse, released by the syce, bounded forward in the joy of having its head turned in the direction of its stable.

"You need not be afraid. The animal is quiet enough when once he has started."

"I'm not a bit afraid, though I did run from those terrible jackals. There isn't much in house-flesh that will knock spots out of a Californian woman's courage. But I don't mind owning up that the thought of spending the night alone in that bungalow scared me—some." After a pause she added, "I shall be grateful to you, Mr. Basildon, all my life."

It was a wonderful drive, lasting nearly two hours in that beautiful Indian night. The horse settled down to a steady pace that could not be called fast. The road was level and wide without fence or visible boundary. In places cotton fields bordered it on both sides. Sometimes a row of palms threw their straight shadows across it. Sometimes the cotton-fields were exchanged for a dry swamp where the reeds and long grasses rustled with a parched swish in the night air.

Margery heard the call of the night-jar again as it flew away from beneath the very nose of the plodding



horse. The spotted owl sent forth its strangled shriek as if its worst enemy had it by the throat and was squeezing its life out. Now and then they passed beneath the shadow of a large banyan tree and disturbed slumbering creatures that scuttled along the branches in blind search of a securer hiding-place.

The road ran through a village here and there. The inhabitants were all asleep and the wood fires outside the huts extinguished. Nothing moved but a pariah dog or two, prowling round the deserted ashes in search of refuse food. Out in the fields the jackals howled, but their call no longer startled Margery. For every weird note or cry that was borne on the night breeze Basildon could give her a reason, and name the creature with which it originated.

Sometimes they talked, she asking questions about the sights and sounds that were met with on that marvellous moonlight drive, he replying with the new pleasure of having an eager sympathetic listener. Then silence fell over them, a silence in which there was no longer any restraint, any awkwardness; a silence more eloquent than speech. They seemed drawn together by some mysterious bond of friendship created by the strange circumstances of travel. The friendship was forged once and for all; and Basildon felt that nothing on his part should ever break it.

It was with a sigh that he turned aside from the road and drove down a rough lane that merged into a grove of banyan trees. Margery caught sight of white tents in the moonlight, a tethered pony and the glimmer of lamps. Dogs barked and two people came forward to meet them.

"Hello! Margery! is that you?" cried Josie Enville immensely relieved to see her friend.

"Basildon! This is good of you to have brought Miss Longford!" was Enville's greeting.

Margery de-cended from her perch with Enville's help. Basildon also got down while the syce removed part of the light luggage from the cart.

"Have you dined?" asked Josie of Margery.

"Mr. Basildon and I had dinner at the travellers'

bungalow near the station. Say! Josie! It's beyond me where I should have slept to-night if he hadn't been there! I never was in a more dreary, uninviting place in my life. The bedroom——!" words failed her to describe its horrors.

Josie laughed in her happy-go-lucky way.

"I can quite imagine how sick you must have felt at the sight of it; but I assure you it is no worse than other dāk bungalows. They are all made on the same pattern. I quite forgot that you wouldn't be bringing a servant and bedding with you like a seasoned old traveller in India. I remembered it only when I went to look at dear little Daffie in her cot after dinner, and then it was too late to do anything."

Meanwhile Envile was deep in conversation with Basildon.

"I'm so glad you have come back," he was saying. "You know we are on the verge of a serious riot; and we can't afford to have such a thing just now. We've got to keep the country as quiet as possible because of all the trouble at home."

"What does Carvalho say about it?"

"He has helped to get us into this mess. He hates the village people and they give him back as good as they get. However, I won't bother you with all the details of it now. You will take over charge in the morning and we'll talk about it in the afternoon. I should like you to see the bridge as soon as possible. It's a fine piece of work."

"I'll go in the early morning, sir; I shall have nothing to do."

"I may as well come with you and we'll also have a look at the tree. I won't keep you any longer; you must be tired after your journey. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

Basildon's hand went to his hat in a salute. He gathered up the reins and put his foot on the step of the cart. Quick and decisive in her movement Margery was at his side.

"Good-bye, Mr. Basildon. Thank you again and again for all you have done. You have been real good

to me, and if ever I can repay you I will. I shall not forget our drive to-night ; it has been the drive of my life."

The words poured forth in a spontaneous torrent. Envile and his wife listened in some surprise. Basildon himself showed signs of embarrassment. He clasped her offered hand and held it.

"I am very glad to have been of assistance," he said warmly. Then suddenly reverting to the old manner that had given offence on board ship, he added, "Please think no more about it."

He released her hand and jumped into the cart with more haste than was necessary for the occasion, touched his tired horse with the whip, and drove off. Margery watched him in the moonlight till he was out of sight.

"That man saved my life," she said as she turned with her hosts towards the tents.

"Did he ? Where ?" asked Josie.

"At Tuticorin ; I was in two twos of falling into the sea. He caught me just in time. I can tell you it was a very close call."

"So that was where you made his acquaintance ?"

"Oh no ! He and I travelled out by the same ship from Liverpool."

They reached the dinner tent where Envile and his wife had been sitting.

"Did Basildon tell you who he was ?" asked Envile.

"No ; but I guess it's engineering of some sort. After all why should he tell me. I didn't inform him that I was in the fruit-canning line."

"Oh ! Margery !" protested Josie.

"He's an Overseer in the Department of Public Works, otherwise the D.P.W." said Envile.

The information conveyed nothing to Margery.

"And what might an Overseer be when he gets busy ?" she asked.

"He's—well !—it's a kind of sergeant's billet," explained Josie, as her husband did not reply to Margery's question.

He corrected her.

"The Department of Public Works is not a branch of the Army, and the work is not military."

"You mean that his position in the eyes of the world is equivalent to the position of a sergeant," said Margery, looking from one to the other in her attempt to comprehend exactly what was meant.

"And in the eyes of Government as well," said Enville. "We are all tied by red tape out here, and know to a fraction where we stand."

"In California we don't fit ourselves in by Government enactment; our position is just what we make it," rejoined Margery.

"And in India it is just what Government makes it."

"Come along, Margery, you must be tired; you will be glad to turn in. We go to bed early in camp as we are up at sunrise."

Josie led the way to a small tent at a little distance and pulled aside the curtain that hung before the entrance.

"Oh! how nice! how comfy!" cried Margery as she looked round at the mosquito-curtained bed with its frilled pillows, the white toilet-table and other signs of civilization. "Josie! if it hadn't been for that splendid sergeant of yours——"

"He isn't a sergeant; he's a D.P.W. Overseer."

"Well! whatever he calls himself, I should have had an awful time of it at that deserted bungalow. He has done me a real good turn by driving me here to-night, and I shan't forget it. I just love him for it!"

"Margery!" cried Josie, laughing, yet slightly shocked. "The same 'Ammurrican' Margery! the same electrifying old dear."

Josephine kissed her friend, bade her good-night and left her in the hands of Mary, a neat young ayah engaged to look after the new English missie.

## CHAPTER VI

AN Indian dawn was breaking. Margery became conscious of the calls of strange birds. The koel over the river sands was beginning his questioning cry of "Who-arc-you! Who-are-you!" and the coppersmith barbet was busy with his "tink ! tink ! " in the trees overhead. A curious sense of being out in the open came over her. It was different from having the window of a bedroom flung wide.

She raised her head and looked round. The walls of her room were canvas and they were moistened with the dew of the night. The scent of the dew on sun-burned earth and dry vegetation was exceedingly pleasant. She could smell the freshness and feel the crispness of the outside air.

Turning on her pillow so that her eyes rested on the chinks of grey light where the purdah hung at the entrance, she gave herself up to the enjoyment of her first experience of an Indian day. The golden dawn was heralding a brilliant morning with the rapidity of the tropics ; and the dimness of the interior of the tent visibly lessened as she watched the shafts of light.

The purdah moved slightly and the streak of light widened. Margery remained quite still, her eyes on the entrance. A small brown fist pushed the curtain aside and a little goblin, fat and chubby and extremely solemn in face, entered. He walked with a sturdy step and stopped half-way between the bed and the purdah. The round black eyes peered at her through the mosquito net.

Of clothes he possessed none. Round his waist a cord was tied tightly from which depended two or three silver ornaments. Margery lifted the mosquito

net and returned the inspection. Not a word was spoken. The little fellow took a step or two nearer. Falling on his knees he placed his hands together and began to repeat something in a language she did not understand. She wondered what request he was making and why it was addressed to her. Was he asking for food? He had no appearance of being kept short of nourishment; his greatest need was in the matter of clothes.

In the middle of the child's performance Mary, the ayah, came in bringing a well-furnished tea-tray; and with her appearance the strange atmosphere created by the kneeling child vanished to Margery's regret. Tea and toast and a brisk serving maid seemed to belong to another world.

"Ai-yoh! what is this budmash doing here?" cried Mary at the sight of her little son. "What narty boy is this! Must give plenty beat for coming into missie's tent without leave!"

The child looked up at her with the earnestness of the priest, who has to say his office no matter how the world may wag around him, and continued praying in his pure treble. Mary set the tray upon a small table, deftly tossed the mosquito net up above the frame that held it, brought Margery's slippers and held out the dressing-gown.

"What is the child saying?" she asked.

"Telling prayers only. Very bad boy, that."

"Why is he saying his prayers?"

"Always telling prayers morning time. Sunnee telling prayers to missie because I got no time to hear."

She picked up the intruder and administered a slap on his bare skin. The child's face puckered and the full lips curved downwards. Tears filled his eyes at the sudden smart and slowly brimmed over; but he uttered no cry. The ayah lifted her hand again to smite the tender unprotected body; but Margery cried out to her to stop.

"Don't hurt the little chap! He has done no wrong. Tell him to say his prayers to God."

"That child too bad only. He says can't see God; he wants to tell prayers to people he can see. What can do with such a narty boy?"

"Put him down and let him sit here if he likes till I am ready to dress."

Nothing loth, Mary bumped her first-born on a mat with his back against the canvas wall near the entrance; and with many injunctions in her own tongue to be good and give no trouble to this radiant queen who had deigned to come among them, departed to see to various matters, such as the heating of the water for the bath and the making of her own coffee.

The child finished his interrupted orisons and then sat perfectly still, his eyes fixed on the wonderful being he had heard called queen. Presently Margery offered him a piece of buttered toast. He accepted it solemnly, balanced it on a fat knee, placed his hands together and repeated his grace. Then he set to work to eat the toast. She watched with some amusement his attempts to bite off the buttered surface first before disposing of the under part. When it was finished, she offered him another slice on which she spread some marmalade. The same method was observed in eating it, the marmalade giving immense satisfaction. When it was all gone the child cleaned himself up with a crimson tongue like a kitten, till not a crumb nor a spot of jam remained on fingers or lips. When Margery had finished, she poured out half a cup of tea for the child.

And now a difficulty occurred. He refused to take the cup in his hands; nor would he touch his lips to the rim when she held it. He sat there expectant with his hands planted on each side on the floor, and his mouth raised and held wide open like a young bird.

Fortunately Mary returned in time to solve the difficulty. She took the cup from Margery's hands and dexterously poured the weak, sweet tea in a thin stream down the little red cavern till it was all gone. How it was that the boy did not choke Margery could not make out. When the tea had disappeared to its last drop the child got on to his feet, put his hands together and said grace.

"Make a salaam to the lady and go outside and wait till I come," said Mary.

He raised his right hand to his forehead in solemn salutation. With his left he patted his stomach. No gesture could better have expressed his gratification and thanks. Then he turned and walked out of the tent, making a second salaam as he lifted the *purdah*. It was done with the gravity of age, and yet it seemed natural and unprompted.

"Whose child is he?" asked Margery.

"Mine, missie," replied Mary, as she moved about the tent performing the various duties of a trained lady's-maid.

"Yours? You are married, then, and have a husband?"

"My husband is Nellappa the peon. Very good, quiet man, that; but very stupid."

"Why do you call him stupid?"

"Plenty too much black. All black people not much sense got. Missie's bath ready."

"Anyway the child is as pretty and sweet——"

"Ah! bah! missie! mustn't say that! Sunnee is a bad boy, very bad; too black like his father."

"Indeed, he isn't black. You wouldn't call him black if you knew the negroes of America. He has a beautiful brown skin——"

Again Mary interposed, and Margery wondered at the asperity with which the mother spoke of her firstborn.

"No, missie! no! That child ugly poor thing; no nice sense; no use at all. Very stupid boy."

"You might give him some clothes all the same. Poor little fellow! He must feel cold on a morning like this."

Margery walked off to her bath, and Mary bustled away perturbed and troubled. She was a Christian, but her Christianity overlaid a long pedigree of superstition. The gods of her country had had to give place to the rule of Christ and the good All-Father; but they were still there. They might be conquered and deprived of their worship; they might even submit to



the Christian God ; but they were neither banished nor destroyed. There were plenty of heathen left in the land to feed and nourish them with sacrifices and with worship. Although she was a Christian, Mary believed that human beings felt their power and that Christian and heathen alike were punished if anything was done to offend them.

Mary had heathen relatives and she had been taught by them that to praise a child was its undoing. It awoke envy in the heart of the heathen gods and roused their malice. If they had overheard the words the new missie had spoken, they would kill the child by sickness or accident, and she would lose her precious firstborn, the apple of her eye, her only one. She had done her best to deceive the evil spirits by abusing the child, but she trembled to think of the possible consequences of the injudicious praise bestowed upon the little boy.

Catching him up in her arms the mother carried him off to the servants' tents, where the coffee was hot upon the embers, and the fresh rice-flour cakes, wrapped in a clean cloth, were laid ready on an enamelled plate—for Mary was fastidious about her food. She smacked her son again, but less severely this time, as she could abuse him to her heart's content without fear of reproach. She called him a sneaking jackal, a starved dog, a dhoby donkey, an unloved beggar, a lump of mud whom no one would wish to see. She assured him—and the listening gods—that it was solely because of his worthlessness that the Great God allowed him to live.

The child stared at her with solemn eyes neither alarmed nor offended ; he was accustomed to hear such epithets fall from his anxious mother's lips. As soon as he caught sight of the early morning meal he folded his hands and repeated his grace—not once, but continuously till a rice cake was finally thrust into his hand.

Mary's mother was Mrs. Envile's ayah. She was a plump, grey-haired woman, as lethargic as her daughter was active. Although a widow, she being a Christian and bound by no heathen rules, wore as many jewels as her daughter. She had been christened Ann ; but the

pronunciation being a difficulty to the Tamil tongue, she was called by her fellow servants "Yann."

If Mary loved the little boy, Yann adored him. She showed her affection by feeding him with sweets, by massaging his plump body and by imparting all the knowledge she, as an uneducated woman, had garnered in her intercourse with the mistresses she had served. She had scrupulously taught her young English charges to say grace before and after meals, and to repeat the prayers chosen for them by their mothers. She was careful to discriminate between her own form of religion and theirs. It seemed quite right and proper that there should be a difference between master and servant. When Daffie was curious to know what prayer Sunnee used, she was told that it was "native child's prayer only," and not suitable for English missics.

Sunnee was not the sole object of his grandmother's love. She possessed two hens and a lean and scraggy cock which she valued highly. Wherever she went with her mistress camping, she contrived to stow away in the carts a small basket, out of which emerged at the end of the journey the three fowls, a little ruffled perhaps with the tight fit, but quite undisturbed by the discomforts of their journey. With a shake or two they rearranged their disordered plumage and lost no time in their search for food. They were tame and trustful, contented to roost in any spot their owner might choose; and they always joined Sunnee at his meals in the hope of picking up a few scraps.

This morning they were there, waiting patiently for the outer fringe of the rice cakes that would presently fall to their lot. One or other of the hens was usually accommodating enough to lay eggs, choosing a favourable opportunity and place in some retired corner of the camp as soon as her owner had let her out. At the first breath of her cackle announcing the accomplishment of her mission, Sunnee set out to find the treasure and brought it safely in. If a hen were foolish enough to yield to instinct and show a desire to sit, Yann had her remedy. She caught the rash creature, tucked its head under its wing and immersed it entirely in cold

water. A repetition of the ducking quenched all longing for maternity ; and after a few weeks the misguided fowl reverted to her morning cackles and the dutiful production of "eefresh yeggs."

As Margery emerged from her tent an hour later, keen and full of curiosity to see the strange life about her, she was met by Sunnee, who had been patiently waiting for her appearance. This time he was clothed ; that is to say, clothed from his mother's point of view. He wore a short scarlet jacket spotted with green. The garment was broader than it was long, and barely reached to the cord girdle. On his head was perched a tiny round cap spangled with gold. This was Sunnee's full dress for gala occasions, and it never went beyond his waist. His feet were bare, and round his ankles were welded some thin silver wire bangles, which faintly chinked as each foot was planted sturdily on the ground.

He carried a newly laid egg in one hand, and raised the other in the oriental salute ; he advanced towards Margery and presented the egg. Not a smile curved the full well-formed mouth, not a quiver indicated trepidation of any kind. He offered her the egg as he had offered her his prayers, with never a doubt but that it would be graciously received.

"Good morning, Margery !" It was Josie Envile who spoke. "How did you sleep ?"

"What am I to do with this egg ? The little chap insists on my having it."

"Take it by all means, and touch your forehead just as he does. Right hand ! In India you must always accept things with your right hand or you offend grievously."

Mrs. Envile called to the matey who was busy in the dining tent.

"Tell cook to boil this egg for missie's breakfast. Thank you, Sunnee, good boy !"

The child salaamed again ; as they walked away he trotted after them.

"So sorry I can't take you for a drive this morning. Guy hasn't had time to see to the motor. He went off

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